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EXEMPLA CONCIONUM;

OR,

PLANS OF SERMONS,

SKETCHED FOR

THE PULPIT.

INTENDED

EITHER AS OUTLINES TO BE FILLED UP BY WRITTEN COMPOSITION
OR AS NOTES TO REGULATE AND FACILITATE

EXTEMPORANEOUS DELIVERY.

VOL. I.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Editor of the following, which are *literally* sketches of Sermons, consisting partly of outline and partly of hints, more or less elaborated into arguments and illustrations, makes no apology for submitting them to the Public. This has been done sufficiently by those who have preceded him in works of a similar description. He has only to observe, that the students, ministers, or lay preachers, who may do him the honour to look into his volume, will soon perceive that while it directs them to important subjects for the Pulpit, and suggests *materials* for their treatment, it affords no encouragement to indolence. Its contents may be *used*, but cannot be *taken*. They do not relieve from the labour of thought ; on the contrary, they render it necessary. Should the work

meet with the patronage which the Editor is led to anticipate ; it will be continued in a series of volumes, each volume, with a few miscellaneous exceptions, containing a distinct class of subjects.

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EXEMPLA CONCIONUM.

PHILIPPIANS I. 6.

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

DIVINE agency and human accountableness, the influence of heaven and the voluntary efforts of man in the great work of religion, cannot be reasonably doubted—they exist together, and cannot be separated. In the scriptures, therefore, true piety in the heart is uniformly exhibited under these two aspects: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.” The glory of salvation in its commencement, progress, and termination, is attributed to God—yet are we exhorted to “enter in at the straight gate”—“to run the race set before us,” and to secure final victory and triumph.—The first is generally employed as a powerful argument and incentive to the latter.

If we consider religion as exclusively a

Divine operation, without comprehending human effort and endeavour, we destroy its character, and convert man into a mere passive instrument, without either faculties or affections, in reference to the noblest pursuit and the most glorious object of his existence.

Again, if we consider it as simply a human thing—the product of unassisted nature—we err in the other extreme, and reduce it to insignificance; like every other labour of man, it would be debased by the imperfections of its author.

Personal religion is in the text emphatically denominated the work of God,—a work which he had actually commenced in the Philippian converts—and of the final completion of which, in judgment and in glory, the Apostle entertained a perfect assurance.

Keeping these observations in mind, let us consider religion,

I. As a *work*—something that is the effect of contrivance—that is performed by certain agency—that is designed for an anticipated result.

II. It is a *divine* work,—as it is effected by the immediate influence of God—as it bears more of the impress of Deity than any other of his works. The soul is but the image of God—even in its perfect state, a faint and distant resemblance of him; but religion is his nature—his life—himself; those who are partakers of this, “are a

kind of first fruits of the creatures"—this reveals more of God than intellectual faculties and volitions—its knowledge regards his being, nature, and government—its reverence his authority and majesty. The properties, sentiments, and feelings of religion have their archetype in God.

III. It is a *spiritual* and *internal* work. It has all the penetrating energy, and the silent invisibility, of spirit—it is the highest reason—the radiance of intelligence. The essence of religion is *spiritual*—and its throne is in the deepest recesses of the human spirit. It is *IN* us, the source of *motive*—the soul of *feeling*—the *spring* of action.

It is distinct from the soul and from nature—yet it is identified with both. It is something foreign from us—yet, when implanted within us, it becomes homogeneous. It is our *knowledge*—yet it is *divine*. It is our love—yet it is the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts. It is *our volition* and *our deed*—yet it is God that worketh in *us* both to will and to do.

IV. It is a *good* work—of benevolence—of purity—of happiness.

V. It is a *progressive* work ; we argue this from

1. Analogy: this is the character of all the works of God.

2. From the nature of man—

He learns nothing by intuition—he acquires nothing but by a succession of persevering efforts—and no pursuit in which he engages terminates in itself.

3. From the character of the present state—

If this work were completed at its commencement, it would imply perfect knowledge of God—of ourselves—and of duty,—an entire eradication of every depraved principle; and the annihilation, as far as we are concerned, of every temptation—danger—and adversary. See verse 8 to 11.

But is not regeneration instantaneous and complete? it is the perfect germ which afterwards gradually develops itself in sanctification.

It is the embryo of religion, or rather, the infancy. An infant is a perfect human being, but many years must elapse before it arrives at the stature of a man.

But though progressive, we observe,

VI. That the *completion* of this work is certain. This arises from a consideration of its

1. Author, whose power is unlimited—whose

purposes are unchangeable—and who redeems every pledge by which he inspires hope and produces desire.

2. From its character.

3. And from the relation which it bears to the reward of Christ—the glory of Christianity—and the final triumphs of the judgment day.

Being confident of this very thing—

1. This is not the confidence of ignorance,

2. Nor the arrogance of fanaticism—

3. It is the sober persuasion of truth—of truth *revealed* to him as an apostle, and taught by him in the spirit of inspiration—of truth *exhibited*, in many instances which had passed under his own observation—of truth *impressed*—his own personal assurance.

Such is religion. Do we experience it?

PSALM XXXI. 15.

My times are in thy hand.

A DEVOUT mind has communion with God, and dwells with complacency in its converse with him—on its dependence—its security—and its happiness.

The doctrine of the text is that of a universally minute, governing, and controlling Providence.

The language is figurative—hand signifies power—the action of the hand is voluntary—it is the instrument of the will—God is conscious of his power—exercises it according to the counsel of his own will.

It is the energy of wisdom—purity—righteousness, and love.

It embraces all persons—seasons—events.—This doctrine is the peculiar glory of revelation.

The guiding and cheering light of the church on earth—and the constant enrapturing theme of glorified spirits in heaven.

But religion loves to *individualize*—to descend from grand and awful generalities to familiar and minute particulars—from the whole to its various parts.

It also loves to *appropriate*.

What are we to understand by times? How these may be considered as our times—and in what sense are they to be viewed as in the hand of God?

I. What are we to understand by times?

1. The aggregate period of human life, from its commencement to its termination.

2. The various contingencies of that period—sickness—health—prosperity—adversity. — The commencement—progress of religion—and all the events that operate to form character, and to prepare for our future destiny.

II. How are these to be considered as our times?

1. As they peculiarly relate to us.

2. Involve us in deep responsibility.

3. And receive their moral complexion and character from our use or abuse of them.

III. How are they in the hand of God?

1. They are parts of the general economy of his government.

2. They are the especial ordination of his Providence.

3. They depend entirely upon his sovereign will and pleasure, and must be resolved unto his absolute disposal. They cannot be directed or determined by any other agency.

But the spirit of genuine religion loves *personally to improve* what it thus individualizes and appropriates.

“*My times are in thy hand.*” This is the language of

1. Devout and pleasurable acknowledgment.

2. Of humble acquiescence.

3. Of adoring gratitude; and

4. Of well-grounded expectation.

JOHN VIII. 36.

If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

WHO has not pronounced the eulogy of freedom! Where is the language in which its

praises are not celebrated ? It is a subject at all times interesting, and there are none so sordid as to regard it with indifference. The love of liberty is a twin feeling with the love of life. Those who have lost the substance, grasp at the shadow ; robbed of the reality, they cling to the imagination, and in chains and dungeons dream that they are free. This universal attachment to liberty is founded in reason, and justified by experience.

“’Tis liberty alone that gives the flower
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume ;
And we are weeds without it.”

But valuable and glorious as liberty is, there is a slavery which usurps its name, and whose usurpation is acknowledged by mistaken and misguided men.

There is a freedom, too, of infinite worth, which is contemned and rejected : it is the freedom spoken of in my text, and which it would be happy for mankind if they enjoyed ; they would then be free indeed. Without this, all civil privileges are comparatively of little moment. This is the truest kind of liberty ; but it is a liberty which those cannot appreciate who are the slaves of sin. In order to break this fatal charm, that I may plead the cause of this freedom, and point you to the source whence it may be obtained, as well as remind you of the obligations under which you are laid to him,

by whom it is purchased and conferred, suffer me in the

Ist place, To expose that slavery which is so generally mistaken for liberty.

II. To exhibit that exalted and glorious freedom which this state of slavery teaches us to undervalue and despise.

III. To consider it as the divine communication of the Son of God.

1st. There is a slavery which is generally mistaken for liberty. We are free, is the language of those who are the servants of sin.

This misapprehension arises from the state of the heart, with regard to sin;—from the pageantries and adventitious glories with which it is invested;—and from the present gratification which it affords.

1. The heart has received a sinful bias; there is a congeniality between depraved desires and their gratification, between libertine principles and the actions to which they lead. The heart chooses evil, and what can be more free than choice? Can he be a slave who feels no restraint—who drinks in iniquity like water—with a peculiar zest and pleasure? It is the moral state of the heart which renders sin

delightful, and makes a contrary pursuit irksome and painful. It is this that supports the delusion that sinfulness is freedom.

2. Again, sin is invested with adventitious splendor. It wears an outward glory which dazzles and deceives the mind. It arrays itself in purple and in gold, and boasts of the number and respectability of its friends. Like its prototype, it takes us to some high mountain, from which it shows us the world and its glory, and informs us, that kingdoms and empires are tributary at its feet. It often allures, too, with the semblance of virtue. The favourite characters of the world, the objects of its idolatry, are formed of a series of splendid virtues, mingled with dark but concealed vices; and this is the foundation of that admiration which they excite. The greatest criminals are generally most successful, and rise to the most distinguished eminence. Thus iniquity is irradiated with the glare of greatness, is followed with the pomp of fashion, endowed with riches, and sanctioned by multitudes. Can there be thralldom in this?

3. Nor can it be denied that sin affords present gratification. But nevertheless it is slavery.

(1). As it is an usurpation of that heart, which belongs to God.



(2). As it is mean and degrading,

“ ——— It holds its votaries
In silly dotage on created things,
Careless of their creator. It is the
Sordid gravitation of their powers
To a vile clod. ——— ”

“ ——— All their hopes
Tend downward ; their ambition is to sink,
To reach a depth profounder still and still
Profounder, in the fathomless abyss
Of Folly, plunging in pursuit of Death.”

(3). As the pleasures it confers are only substitutes for a sublime and heavenly satisfaction, of which it robs the soul ; and the forerunners of the most abject misery.

Holy contemplations—ecstatic visions of faith—the luxurious enjoyments of hope—interchange of love between pure and happy spirits—the Saviour, and God the judge of all ; satisfactions which create a paradise around us, and convert a mortal man into a radiant angel. Now, for what are these delights exchanged ? for prurient reflections on past scenes of folly and sin ; for vile anticipations of mere criminal passion ; for the converse of depraved or frivolous companions ; for those pursuits which drain the world of the last drop of pleasure which it can possibly yield, and which leave a man impoverished and wretched before he has lived out half his days. And, oh, whither does all this tend ? What will the consequences be

at last—in sickness—in death—and through eternity?

Are you not anxious to be free? Let me call your attention,

II. To that exalted and glorious freedom which this state of slavery teaches us to undervalue and despise.

One of the worst evils arising from the thralldom of sin is, that it holds the mind in fatal ignorance of genuine liberty, and arms it with the strongest prejudices against its truest interests. But however men may depreciate it, this freedom is distinguished by excellencies peculiar to itself, and which stamp it with an infinite superiority above every other.

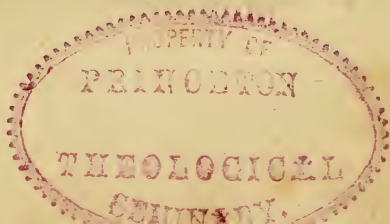
1. It is freedom which delivers from the heavy and tremendous penalties of sin—from

“Ages of hopeless misery, future death—
And death still future—not an hasty stroke,
Like that which sends us to the dusty grave,
But unrepealable enduring death!”

2. It is freedom purchased by sacrifice,

“Bought with his blood, who gave it to mankind,
And sealed with the same token.”

Freedom confirmed by the death of the most illustrious martyrs. No freedom is so costly as this.



3. It is freedom which, when once imparted, endures for ever,—which no circumstances can alter,—which

“ Monarchs cannot grant, and all
The powers of earth and hell confederate take away,
A liberty which persecution, fraud,
Oppression, prisons have no power to bind,
Which whoso tastes can be enslaved no more.”

4. It is freedom of mind—of action—and of privilege.

(1). As freedom of mind it is distinguished from the licentiousness of scepticism, and the lust of doubt—it is opposed to error and prejudice, which enchain the soul, narrow its intellectual range, and circumscribe its enjoyments. It is the freedom of truth to think for itself, and to think aright.

(2). Freedom of action ; freedom to perform the noblest actions, and to make the greatest sacrifices with ease and satisfaction.

(3). It is freedom of privilege, and entitles to glory, honour, and immortality ; it imparts all the possessions of earth ; and its votary is

“ ——— Free by birth,
Of no mean city planned, or ere the hills
Were built, the fountains opened, or the sea,
With all its roaring multitude of waves.”

But let us consider this freedom,

III. As the divine communication of the Son of God. This is freedom which comes from him, and which he alone can confer.

A civil constitution yielding all the blessings of artificial society, cannot emancipate the mind from the dominion of error, prejudice, and vice, cannot impart holy principles, nor make us denizens of the skies.

The religions which have obtained in the world have been equally inefficient here. They have indeed only deepened the shades of error, strengthened the principles of vice, and narrowed the sphere of enjoyment. Idolatry and paganism may be justly considered as the most abominable species of tyranny that ever enslaved mankind. The religion of the Jews left many remaining burthens incompatible with a state of perfect liberty; and the enjoyment of the external privileges of salvation, did not emancipate from bondage the children of Abraham. Nor can the institutions of Christianity, and the means of grace with which we are indulged, of themselves set men free from the thralldom of sin and death. It is the sole prerogative of the Son of God, and his royal act to liberate the captives, and to open the prisons to them that are bound.

1. The principles which lead to this freedom he reveals.

2. The efficacy of these principles he secures.

3. The enemies that threaten it he subdues.

4. The impediments to its perfect enjoyment he removes. All this he accomplishes by his intercession in our behalf, and by the communication of his grace.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. How pitiable is their condition, who are in a state of spiritual and moral slavery, and who are unconscious of their degradation and wretchedness! Of how many ideas and feelings are they destitute, which it would be their highest glory to possess.

2. I may be addressing some who are struggling to be free—suppose I were haranguing you in a Roman forum, on civil liberty—perceiving that I had roused your indignation against your tyrants, how should I close the oration. Leading you to the temple of the gods, I would point you to the altar; I would place the censer in your hands, and I would say, swear to be free or die. Behold the cross, there bring all your sacred vows.

3. To those who enjoy this freedom, I need not say it is liberty, and not licentiousness. You

must be a subject, and not a slave; you are to obey, and not to rule. But you are to obey a Master, whose service is perfect freedom—you have sworn fidelity to this Prince, and will you be perjured traitors? Satan, it is true, will tempt you still—he will spread before you all the glory of the world; but remember, you are sworn to Christ, you have reiterated the oath a thousand times, you have sealed it with the precious symbols of his flesh and blood.

This freedom, oh Christian, is a freedom of privilege—how happy are you now—how much happier will you be at death—and then you will be infinitely happy for ever.

ROMANS X. 3.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

IN this text notice three things:—

I. Israel's conduct—

“Going about to establish a righteousness of their own.”

II. The cause of this conduct—

“Being ignorant of God's righteousness.”

III. The consequence of it—

“They have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

I. Israel's conduct, “Going about”—this implies, earnestness of inquiry—diligence in pursuing—perpetuity of design—“to establish a righteousness of their own.”

1. By ritual observances.

2. By moral obedience.

3. By repentance.

(1). In their own strength.

(2). With a view to their own glory.

II. The cause of this conduct—“Ignorance of God's righteousness.”

1. Ignorance on the most momentous subject in the universe to them.

2. Ignorance without excuse.

3. Ignorance implying great moral depravation. Ignorant of the

(1). Holiness of the Divine nature.

(2). Of the rectitude and spirituality of the Divine law.

(3). Especially of the Evangelical righteousness, which is designed to illustrate the holiness of God, and the rectitude of his government, in the forgiveness of sins, and the salvation of sinners.

(1). This is a righteousness, which God requires—

(2). Which God performs—

(3). Which God accepts—

This is a righteousness—perfect in its nature—vicarious in its design—and which is beneficial to them for whom it is intended by *faith*—or what the Apostle here terms *submitting*. To submit is, to acquiesce—to surrender—to yield—to renounce ourselves and all dependance upon our own righteousness, and to consent to salvation on the terms which God proposes—unconditional, unreserved compliance. Now this, through their obstinate adherence to their own righteousness, and their pertinacious ignorance, the professed people of God did not attain, and we are brought, in the

IIIrd place, to notice the consequence of their conduct.

1. They are in the situation of unsubdued rebels against the divine government, who are unable to resist, and yet unwilling to receive clemency.

2. Their pride is odious.

3. Their prejudice deep.

4. Their guilt enormous.

5. They either repose in fatal security, or are perplexed with agonizing uncertainty.

6. Their destruction is inevitable.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Let us remember that these Israelites are a fair sample of human nature, as it exists under an external revelation of mercy.

2. We see what are the great obstacles to man's attaining the righteousness of faith.

3. The duty and privilege of sinners. As they cannot acquire a righteousness of their own, it is incumbent upon them to seek, as it will be their happiness to submit to, the righteousness of God.

I KINGS XVIII. 21.

*And Elijah came unto all the people, and said,
How long halt ye between two opinions? if the
Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then
follow him. And the people answered him
not a word.*

INDECISION of character is a moral disease productive of the most distressing consequences. The man who wants decision, suffers the tone of his mind to be relaxed; his understanding is filled with lumber instead of knowledge; he is the sport of circumstances; his character wants dignity, and his heart enjoyment; his passions are wasted; his reflections are embittered; he must hate himself, and be dissatisfied with all around him.

A decisive tone of mind and character, is in nothing of so much importance as in the commencement and progress of a religious course. This is evident, if we consider what is to be abandoned and what is to be chosen.

There are two great competitors for the soul of man, and to one or other of these all the souls that are, are subject, and they are thus subject by their own choice. You in a moment anticipate who these competitors are,—the Eternal God, and the apostate spirit. Under the

dominion of the latter, we all enter upon the present state of existence, and grow up, unless prevented by Divine grace, into our permanent moral habits, the willing instruments of his power. Some are happily rescued from his grasp. Their number is every hour increasing; they join the standard of the great God of heaven and earth, and are formed into a holy and distinguished band of apostles, martyrs, evangelists, and saints. These are continually gaining upon the kingdom of darkness. Jehovah irradiates them with his own glory, sends them forth to plead his cause, and to state his claims. He animates them by his own spirit; a spirit of wisdom and knowledge, of understanding and might. He furnishes them with unequivocal tokens of his presence, pours contempt on the wisdom of the wise, confounds the power of the mighty, and makes the diviners mad. He proclaims in the voice of his providence, while his servants labour to impress an unthinking world,—he proclaims his perfections and his government, his wisdom, power, and love. Some are convinced, and many hesitate—they know not what to do—their prejudices and opinions, their habits and their feelings, are all on the side of their worst enemy, who holds as by a charm their intellects, their affections, and their will. He has a thousand ways of governing mankind, and suits his instruments to the peculiar character of every age and nation.

Before me I perceive the worshippers of the true God, — those who are decided in their choice, who are exclaiming “Whom have I in heaven but thee?” Others I observe, the language of whose conduct is, “What is the Almighty that I should serve him, and what profit shall I have if I pray unto him?” but a third class are halting between two opinions; their understandings—their deliberate convictions—their fears—are all on the side of religion. But the God of this world, in one or other of the forms in which he presents himself to mortals, possesses their hearts and affections. Standing on the threshold of the temple, they will not enter, and yet they dare not turn back—they are almost persuaded—alas! but almost. In order to lead you to decision, gently to force you into the sanctuary, allow me to

I. Notice the claims of Jehovah as an object exclusively to be worshipped and supremely loved.

II. To enforce the necessity of prompt and persevering decision in choosing and devoting yourselves to him.

III. To expostulate with you on that indecision which has hitherto robbed you of dignity and happiness, and which may eventually prove your utter and eternal ruin. In the

Ist Place, allow me to state the claims of Jehovah as an object to be exclusively worshipped and supremely loved.

The object I place before you is Jehovah, a God full orb'd with glory. I do not place him in competition, for with whom shall I compare him?

1. Consider his essential perfections: the eternity of his being—the spirituality of his essence—the efficiency of his independence and his almightiness.

2. Consider his communicable perfections, which render him the source, and the only source, of happiness to intelligent creatures—his infinite wisdom—his immaculate holiness—his boundless goodness and his incomprehensible mercy.

This is Jehovah, who inhabiteth the praises of Israel—who, while the shout of praise surrounds the altar, displays his glory in the cloud above it. Praise is the proper element only of that Being who is all perfection; others may be flattered, but the praise of angels falls short of his glory; like the arrow shot upwards to the skies, it rises to a certain height, and then falls again. This Being also deserves to be supremely loved. What are the gods of the heathen? what is the world, honours, distinctions, wealth, and pleasure? what assistance can they afford in the

hour of depression and sorrow—can they disarm death? Miserable comforters are they all—physicians of no value. But I proceed,

II. To enforce the necessity of decision, both in our choice of the object of worship and happiness, and during the whole of our religious progress.

Indecision on this momentous subject

1. Is utterly incompatible with our perilous circumstances, and with the ardour and perseverance which religion necessarily requires.

2. The necessity of decision during our religious progress, arises from the power of Satan, who is always vigilant to destroy, who knows how to undermine the half-formed purpose; from the allurements and terrors of the world; and from the depravity of our own hearts.

Decision should be prompt, for we may soon perish—it should be firm, for we have much to encounter, and to suffer—it should be persevering, or we may lose all that we have gained, and be disappointed of all we hope. And now let me,

III. Expostulate with you on the indecision which has hitherto robbed you of dignity and happiness, and which may eventually prove your utter and eternal ruin.

This day I have set before you life and death.

Choose you whom you will serve? You must serve; it is not the prerogative of man to govern. How miserable is the fate of the undecided.

1. Look at the man himself, open his bosom, see what contending passions torment him. Hope and fear and shame—the love of the world and the terrors of conscience: he wishes to serve God, because he trembles at the consequences of neglect; yet he wishes to court the favour of the world a little, to taste a little of its pleasures, to reap a little of its gains.

2. Place him before the world, they will laugh with him, if possible they will draw him into all their excesses; but when his back is turned, they despise him—he wants that decision essential to his respectability even in the world.

3. Place him before the church, they hope that the root of the matter is in him; but there is so much levity—so much conformity to the world—so much indecision, that they hope with trembling.

4. Place him before angels—

“If angels tremble, 'tis at such a sight.”

5. Place him before the Son of Man—hear him—“No man can serve two masters.”—“If any man be ashamed of me,” &c. &c.

6. Anticipate the harvest of the world—behold the reapers—the wheat and the tares they know; but here is a nondescript species of weed—it has the stalk and blade of wheat, but not the ear—they touch him with anxiety—they tremble—they bring him before the light of the Eternal Throne—they discover the cheat, and drop their charge.

But he must appear before the throne of the Eternal.

O the terrors of the Judge's eyes—his eyes are like a flame of fire.

PSALM LXXII. 15.

And he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba : prayer also shall be made for him continually ; and daily shall he be praised.

THE glory of Messiah is the first, the noblest object in the divine mind. And, accordingly, it is the object which regulates the dispensations of Providence, and which gives a glow and a dignity to the pages of Revelation. The rise and fall of the mighty empires of the world; the revolutions of kingdoms; the four great monarchies of

the earth ; the amazing power founded on their ruin, which for centuries kept the nations in awe, and then sunk into insignificance, with every other event recorded in the annals of time, have been subservient to this grand purpose ; have been but the scaffolding to that magnificent edifice which the Almighty is rearing as a pedestal, on which he means to place the cross of his Son, and whose columns are to be inscribed with his achievements.

Scripture, the index of the divine mind, is but the gradual development of a wonderful design, which centers in the same object ; and in this respect, there is an exact harmony between Providence and Revelation.

That glorious Sun which has illumined a benighted world, shines with reflected rays ; it borrows its effulgence from Him who is a light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. As the glory of Messiah is thus dear to God, so it has a mighty influence in the hearts of all that love him. Accordingly, it is this which excites the praises of glorified spirits in heaven, the concern of the redeemed on earth, and the prayers of dying saints. Abraham, before the throne, and David, in his expiring hour, feel equally interested in it. The latter, in this Psalm, gains by it unwonted heat, when the fires of Nature are nearly extinguished, utters the sublime prophecy of our text, and dies.

The Psalm commences with a prayer for Solomon, into whose hands the pious David is about to resign his dignity and vacant throne.

The spirit of prophecy led him forward to distant ages; and while he was describing the magnificence and glory of Solomon's reign, he saw that the grandeur of his house with Solomon should decline.

Turning from the painful reflections of the evils that should come upon his family, he directed his thoughts to a more glorious period, and contemplated the dignity of a person nobler than Solomon and a greater than he: he realized the time when of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, God would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. Warmed by the contemplation of this delightful æra, and enraptured with the view of the Redeemer's glory, he exclaims, "He shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba. Prayer also shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be praised," &c.—In illustrating this animating language, we shall consider it as referring,

I. To the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

II. To the stability of his kingdom.

III. To the perpetuity of his reign.

IV. To the spirit of his subjects.

1. As it is the opinion of an excellent scripture critic, Maclaurin, that this phrase, "He shall live," has immediate respect to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, I very briefly mention it as a distinct head. The resurrection of Christ is a fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, on which, as an evidence, its truth or falsehood depends.

Prove upon the Evangelist's contradiction in their statement of the fact; prove it the result of collusion; and the religion we have embraced is a cunningly devised fable. On the other hand, once establish the truth, that Christ arose from the dead; and this singly will carry the Gospel through the world.—A fact of so much importance, we naturally expect to be the subject of prophecy, and we are not mistaken—"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption"—are the exhilarating sounds which we hear from the prophetic lyre of holy David; and in our text, in more exalted strains, he declares, "He shall live."

Prophecy unfolded to him a scene the most adverse to his hopes, and the hopes of the church. He saw the Redeemer, whose glory he had so often viewed with ecstasy, not ascending the chariot of triumph, but hanging on the cross of

ignominy: he heard him groan—he witnessed the holy anxiety of surrounding angels while they hovered round the dismal scene; and when the Saviour bowed his head and died, he saw the dejection which marked the countenance of the beloved disciples; but lighted by the torch of the skies, he pierced the thickest gloom; he beheld the rising day and the rising God; and as if the future had already transpired, he leaves the record, “He shall live.” We turn to the historic page, and we find the whole confirmed: “He is not here, he is risen.” This, then, is a pledge for all the rest, and we may proceed in our subject with confidence: we stand on hallowed ground: all must be accomplished. We may now consider the text in its most extensive import; and if any should deride our expectation as enthusiasm and madness, our answer is, “The Lord is risen, he is risen indeed.” The next idea which the first part of our text suggests,

II. Is the stability of the Redeemer’s kingdom. “He shall live,” supposes that the Redeemer should be exposed to enemies who would attempt to destroy his name, and exterminate his dominion; for it is not natural to say of any person, “he shall live,” but when we have a view of something that seems to threaten the contrary; we may therefore consider these words as expressive of the stability of the Mediator’s throne.

And when we consider the hosts of hell and earth, which have ever combined their councils and their efforts in opposition to Christianity, it surely is consoling to think, that unerring prophecy has recorded something to animate our hopes, and to give vigour to our exertions. "He shall live," that is, his government is founded on a basis more firm than the pillars of heaven—his own omnipotence: the horrid tempest and awful earthquake may agitate the whole frame of nature. The volume of desolation, to use the strong language of Mason, may roll through the starry worlds; and the most stupendous edifice, creation itself may tumble into ruins; but "he shall live." Hell may prepare its engines; the kings and rulers of the earth may take council together, but at the breath of his mouth they shall flee away. No weapon that is formed against him shall prosper.

This is the spirit of the prophecy, and how has it been realized? Is this an empty boast? No; the church is, indeed, founded on a rock, and the gates of hell can never prevail against it. Not any thing in the world ever met with such furious, such persevering opposition, as Christianity: not any thing in the world ever appeared so little able to bear the slightest resistance. Yet, the grain of mustard-seed, cast into an unheeded spot in the vast Roman empire, worked unobserved its way, became a great tree, and spread out its vigorous branches, and covered

the earth. A simple man, with a few simple men in his train, fishermen, the sons of fishermen, confounded the wisdom of the wise, baffled the most subtle policy of man, and with the world against them, rose superior to the world, undermined establishments imposing from their antiquity, swayed the sceptre over the ferocious passion of rude barbarians, and broke the charm of opinion, by which sages and philosophers held the more civilized nations in awe.

There are two things equally powerful, which have alternately been employed to invalidate the truth of my text. These are, persecution and temporal prosperity.

A spirit of persecution from without, and a spirit of persecution from within, almost deluged the world with blood, and that blood was the blood of Christians. Pagan idolaters and Popish idolaters spent their utmost rage, and commenced a war of extermination against vital Christianity. But He that sat in the heavens had them in derision. The blood of the Martyrs was the seed of the church.

In the interval, between Pagan and Papal persecution there was a dreadful calm, which threatened more serious evils to the kingdom of the Redeemer than the tempest and the hurricane.

That temporal prosperity which paved the way for what was called the aggrandizement of the church, was the finest stroke of the policy of

hell that was ever devised ; but in this our great enemy was foiled—the spirit of persecution could not sleep—the emissaries of Satan had embraced the most destructive weapons ; but all would not do : it was the opposition of a worm against God ; they did not in the smallest degree affect the stability of Emanuel's throne. No—every age as it passes away bears its impressive testimony, that the kingdom which the God of heaven has set up, instead of being weakened by the concentrated force of its adversaries, receives continually accession to its strength. The bush on fire still burns on from age to age—still unconsumed—shooting out its branches in every direction—a wonder to the world. The church, like the little bark which held a sleeping Redeemer, though beaten by Persecution's roughest waves, has outlived the storm. When the tempest has gathered and looked the most portentous, then the Lord has risen, he has rebuked the waves, and there has been a great calm, for the winds and the seas obey him.

That religion, meant to be swept away, has escaped the violence, strengthening in spite of oft repeated blows, prospering in spite of oft repeated plunder, which gives ten-fold force to the animating prophecy, “ He shall live.”

This also, in the

IIIrd. Place, is expressive of the perpetuity of the Redeemer's reign.

• He shall live for ever—of his kingdom there shall be no end—his authority can know no period—the light of Israel shall never be quenched.

When the sun himself shall grow dim with age, Christ and his kingdom shall live; when time has performed all its revolutions, and ages and generations are crumbled to dust and forgotten—still it shall be said of the Redeemer, “He shall live.”

The progress of Emanuel’s cause is unlike and every way different from every thing else in the world. Age enfeebles the natural strength of the human constitution—political institutions yield to its all-potent influence. The largest and most powerful empires which keep the world in awe, and spread terror and admiration around them, maintain their rank and power for a few centuries, and then retire from the stage, as though they had never been.

But the progress of Christianity is just the reverse of this; at no period can we say concerning it, it has reached its *acmè*; from this moment it will gradually decline. No—it grows in splendor and in strength—it embraces the most distant periods, and unfolds to every succeeding age more of its glories—it has assisted at the funeral obsequies of nations the most mighty that ever figured in the annals of time; and it waits, with the composure of one conscious of victory, till it shall shout, to the admiration of

the universe, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our God, and of his Christ."

But the question naturally recurs, By what means are these expectations to be realized? How is the kingdom of Christ to maintain its ground and extend its limits, so that it may be perpetual and universal? Some of these means are mentioned in our text: "To him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be praised;"—and these words, in the

IVth Place, we consider as referring to the spirit of the subjects under the dominion of Messiah; for in this glorious object we are workers together with God. These are distinguished by an

1. Ardent love and constant attention to the duties of public worship.

2. By a spirit of fervent piety.

3. By a spirit of liberality.

And by these three simple means, the divine Emanuel has preserved his kingdom, and replenished it with subjects; secured its perpetuity, and by these he will eventually evangelize the world.

1. "Daily shall he be praised"—this certainly refers to the spirit of attending public worship,

which, in every age, is to characterize the subjects of Emanuel—this is called praising him ; and what is the preaching of the gospel, but a display of the excellencies of Jesus ? What is every sermon but the eulogy of Christ ? When the first Christians assembled together, it was to sing hymns unto Christ, and to talk of him whom their souls loved. When Heathens entered into their assemblies, they were detained, and induced to join themselves unto them by the secret charm which lurks in the name of Jesus.

“ Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion.”

This intimates, that the sanctuary is the sacred place where the honours of Emanuel are especially celebrated ;—and the ordinance of public worship, which Christ hath instituted, has, in every age, been the grand instrument in the conversion of sinners ; thousands of stubborn, hardened rebels, have been, by this, subdued ; and as it is so powerful a means, it is the decree of Jesus, that it shall be perpetual.

Accordingly, we see daily new places of worship rising up ; old ones breaking forth on the right hand, and on the left. A constant succession of ministers, endowed with gifts and graces to qualify them for the office of recommending Christ ; and daily praising him in the administration of his ordinances.

The next means referred to in our text, and which is intimately connected with the former,

for promoting the cause of the Redeemer in the world, is a

2. Spirit of exalted piety—"Prayer also shall be made for him continually." Whenever God has great things to do for the church, he uniformly pours out upon it a spirit of prayer. The text mentions a specific object of prayer—the glory of the Redeemer. Till of late years, this was an object little thought of; it did not fire the devotion of our public assemblies; it was almost wholly neglected in the family and the closet; but, blessed be God, the spirit with which the hearts of prophets, apostles, and martyrs glowed, now hovers over the British churches, now warms the breasts of thousands.

Brethren, it augurs well, for prayer is omnipotent—God honours it—it moves the hand that moves all things; its wonderful efficacy has been proved; and every enlightened mind and regenerated heart employs it in every exigency. Does the Christian feel his wants? Behold him prostrate at a throne of grace;—is he in difficulty? His first resource is prayer. Does the success of any object lie near his heart? He prays for it continually. And what object so dear to a Christian as the glory of his Saviour? What so desirable to his heart as the spread of the gospel? Accordingly, he prays with fervour—"thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is

done in heaven ;"—it enters into all his religious exercises. In short, the prophecy in the text is descriptive of every servant of Jesus ; all his subjects thus pray. It is an effect which his spirit, more or less, produces in them all.

But there is another feature characteristic of the servants of Christ, which has greatly contributed to the spread of the gospel, and that is

3. A spirit of liberality.

The reign of Jesus is the reign of love ; and, to all his people, his yoke is easy, and his burthen light.

The subjects of every empire are bound to support their government. They are not to withhold any thing in their power, which may conduce to the glory and prosperity of the state ; but their offerings are not always the expression of love and cheerful obedience. But wherever there is a subject of Emanuel, there is a heart always ready for every good work ; and though the Redeemer is infinitely rich—though the treasures of the universe are his, and he could carry into effect all his purposes without the assistance, yea, even in opposition to the whole world—yet he is pleased condescendingly to accept the expression of love which all his people delight to offer. Gold, all-potent gold, performs miracles ; almost every thing yields to its influence. Gold is the grand resource of statesmen ; it realizes their plans, marshals troops, subdues kingdoms.

Gold speaks every language; it gives consequence to the merchant, levels mountains before him, and fills up valleys; it unlocks the treasures of science to the scholar, and conducts the sons of ambition to the summit of honour.—And why, to use an expression of our old divines, may not “the earth help the woman?” Consecrated to the service of the Redeemer, gold has been of vast utility; without it, nothing can spread the gospel but a constant exertion of miraculous power; but God never performs miracles when ordinary means will conduct to the same end. He, therefore, animates the hearts of his people with a warm love for his cause; and, constrained by this love, the miser becomes liberal; gold and silver spontaneously flow into the treasury of Emanuel, and all his wealthy subjects present him cheerfully with the gold of Sheba.

This gold has built our places of worship—it has borne, on the wings of the winds, our missionaries to heathen shores. It has printed millions of Bibles—has established schools and benevolent institutions almost without number—and, blessed be God, our own age has furnished instances of a spirit of a liberality in the cause of the Redeemer, which have not a parallel in the annals of the Christian history, and which are a striking illustration of our text: “To him shall be given of the gold of Sheba.”

1. From this subject we observe, that the fulfil-

ment of this prophecy in Christ, is a proof of the inspiration of the scriptures, and the divinity of the Christian religion.

2. We observe, that amidst the uncertainty and disappointments of the present life, we should do well to solace ourselves with the contemplation of the advancement and glory of Christ's spiritual kingdom.

3. This subject should animate ministers to the most lively exertions in their divine employment.

LUKE XIV. 26. 33.

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and his mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

So likewise, whosoever he be of you, who forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

WHO can but admire the sincerity of the gospel?—it is all ingenuousness and candour. If it ever exaggerate, its exaggerations relate not

to its promises, its prospects, or its bliss ; but to its sacrifices, its dangers, and its sorrows.

Infinite importance is attached to our being disciples of Christ. If we cannot be his disciples, we cannot receive the benefits of his redemption—we cannot be distinguished by his favour—we cannot share the honours of his kingdom.

Let me, then,

I. Describe to you what it is to be a disciple of Christ.

II. Show that the most formidable obstacles to our attaining this high character, frequently arise out of the natural relations, honours, and possessions of the present life.

III. That, so far as these relations, honours, and possessions, are opposed to the interests of our salvation, and no farther, are they to be renounced and forsaken.

IV. That the religion which demands such sacrifices is worthy of them, and includes in its glorious rewards an infinite compensation for whatever we may renounce for its sake.

1. I am to point out to you what it is to be a disciple of Christ.

1. To embrace his doctrines—to know them

in their peculiarity—to believe them in all their ineffable mysteriousness—to admit them when most repugnant to our natural pride and love of independence.

2. To obey his precepts—to renounce every other authority in religion as regards both faith and practice—to unite ourselves distinctly and avowedly with his followers, however calumniated and despised; and to take every other badge and mark which the founder of Christianity has imposed upon his disciples—to wear the order of the cross.

3. To imbibe his spirit—a spirit of self-renunciation—of exclusive devotement—of supreme affection to the Saviour—a spirit altogether unworldly and heavenly.

Such, my brethren, is the nature of Christian discipleship. It comprehends this—all this—nothing less than this. But the text implies,

II. That the most formidable obstacles to our attaining this high and peculiar character, arise out of the natural relations, honours, and possessions of the present life.

The world is, and ever has been, in its doctrines, its ethics, and its spirit, diametrically opposed to genuine Christianity. In all these views it is an enemy of amazing power; because it is in constant alliance with the depravity of our

hearts—is every moment surrounding us with objects, present and palpable, importunate and dangerous, and which in myriads of instances are uncontrollable.

But let all the evil of the world, as that evil frowns upon Christianity, be embodied and arrayed against us in our families and connexions; let the mighty phalanx approach us, led on by our friends, and those whom we most love—how fearful is our condition—the ties of consanguinity—the force of habit—and both these strengthened by the power of reciprocal endearments; let the gospel be on one side, and all these on the other.

Under all these forms of power and influence, suppose Christianity has to contend with Judaism, in all its strict, proud, and unyielding exclusiveness; with paganism under all its aspects of fascination, and of power to hold the spirit and heart of man in subjection;—with bigoted sectarian intolerance, maintaining some exploded errors and systems which our conscience tells us are contrary to the religion we wish to embrace, and the importance of which we feel and acknowledge.

But add to these, honours such as Paul forfeited, and Agrippa dared not renounce—covetousness which Felix could not forego, and the young man who had large possessions would not relinquish;—let these, any of these, all these, be placed in absolute hostility to the gospel, or in competition with it—and is this an unwarrantable

supposition? surely, no. In this case one must yield—one must be relinquished—the world or Christ. This leads me,

III. To show, that so far as the natural relations, honours, and possessions of the present life are obstacles to our becoming true Christians, and *no farther*, they are to be renounced—to be hated—and forsaken.

Are we, under any circumstances, to hate our friends and relatives? Certainly not.

It is not imperative upon us, if we are smitten on one cheek, *literally* to turn the other.

We are to forsake all, that is, all *comparatively* in respect of affection; and *absolutely* whenever it stands in competition with our duty to Christ.

We are not to suppose, because we are Christians, that we are, under any circumstances, to forget what is due to our parents, our children, and our connexions.

The laws of nature are not abrogated by the precepts of the gospel. Christianity regulates, purifies, and exalts natural affection—it does not, cannot, annihilate it—it would then be at war with social existence.

In a modern poem of great beauty and power, this sentiment is exhibited in a very touching and affecting manner. The father of the speaker is a bigoted and sanguinary Jew, the assassin of Christians: she is a Christian proselyte, devoted to the Redeemer. But does her allegiance to

her Saviour destroy her natural affection for her parent? Oh, no. Who can resist the nature and the religion equally powerful in the following expostulation with one who upbraided her father, and urged her to obey literally the command of my text?

“ Oh! cease: I pray thee, cease.

Javan! I know that all men hate my father;

Javan! I fear that all *should* hate my father:

And, therefore, Javan, must his daughter's love

Make up to his forlorn and desolate heart

The forfeited affection of his kind.

Is 't not so written in our law? And He

We worship came not to destroy the law.

Then let men rain their curses, let the storms

Of human hate beat on his rugged trunk;

I will cling to Him—starve, die, bear the scoffs

Of men upon my scattered bones with Him.”

Whatever resists, must be conquered.

Whatever would compete, must be frowned into its secondary station.

Whatever would ensnare, must be suspected and avoided.

We must at last forsake all.

O! how merciful is Christianity to attract us from all, and by an object *infinitely* glorious in itself, and thus to prepare and reconcile us to what is inevitable.

IV. That the religion which demands such sacrifices as these is worthy of them.

It bestows present peace—

Superiority to the world's frowns and smiles.

It imparts happiness, by balancing the reason and the affections, and placing both under its redeeming influence.

It gives a foretaste of heaven in communion with the Saviour.

It bestows heaven itself.

Address the,

1. Inconsiderate Christian.

2. The mistaken Christian.

3. The timid Christian.

4. The stedfast Christian.

JEREMIAH II. 19.

Thy backslidings shall reprove thee.

THE work of religion in the human heart is progressive; when it first enters, it is like a little leaven, which a woman hid in a measure of meal; or like the first ray of light that proclaims the dawning of the day; and hence its commencement

and progress is compared to that of the light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The natural tendency of all grace, is to increase, and to perfection; but its course is frequently interrupted, and its influence weakened by the depravity of the heart, and the corruptions which are in the world through lust. The law in the members warreth against the law of the mind; and it often happens, that the Christian who ought to advance, is stationary; and his motions are frequently retrograde when he should be pressing forwards towards the mark, for the prize of his high calling.

This is called, in the language of the scriptures, backsliding; it is a striking figure taken from Nature; it intimates, that the path of religion lies up hill—that it is often slippery: and it also impresses us with the idea, that when we once begin to slide, we descend with great rapidity, and lose in a moment the labour of years. But some from this representation will take up the idea, that as the ways of religion are thus difficult and hazardous, they are therefore unprofitable and unpleasant. But the reverse of this is true: “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” They require, indeed, perseverance and continual sacrifice; but this is quite compatible with internal peace and satisfaction of mind; and those who pass through the greatest difficulties and advance the most rapidly in religion are the most happy. Grace

grows by exercise ; and the more grace a man possesses, the greater is his felicity. It is the backslider who is wretched ; his religion is covered with a sickly hue—he is like a person infected with a wasting disease which preys upon his vitals. He can do nothing with vigour, and yet the voice that addresses the strongest Christian, calls upon him, and says, “ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, since there is no work nor device in the grave, whither we all are hastening.”

Backsliding has its different degrees. It begins in the soul, and spreads its baneful influence over the affections ; but there are many instances in which it seems to rest, and does not apparently issue in actual and open sin ; but in others it often proceeds farther. It begins in omitting the duties of the closet ; then proceeds to the family ; and last of all, it appears to the world, and terminates in complete and awful apostacy ; and in all its progress, it is a monster which inflicts punishment and vengeance on its victims ; like the syren, it allures but to destroy ; and we may address every backslider in the language of my text : “ Thy backslidings shall reprove thee.” In discoursing from these words, we propose, in the

Ist place, To detect the backslider in his wanderings ; and,

II. To trace his punishment in his crime.

1. Let me set before you the symptoms of a backsliding state.

1. Compare the holy abstractedness of your soul from the world, when you first believed with that earthly mindedness which has now crept into your heart.

2. Contrast your indifference and negligence respecting the means of grace and divine ordinances with what you once felt.

3. Look at your present coldness of zeal to promote the glory of God, the welfare of souls, and to advance in righteous obedience with that ardour which once distinguished you. It is not with you as in days that are past. What has produced the change? There are two things equally potent which produce backsliding of heart and life when they are not sanctified and rendered blessings to us. The sun of prosperity burns up religion when we seek not the shadow of that rock which will secure us from its scorching rays; or the floods of affliction will drown it, if we flee not to Him who is a covert from the tempest, and a refuge from the storm. I mark the first entrance of sin into your heart—the business and the successes of life tempted you—you

began to form excuses for the world—you thought your enemy wore the features of a friend—or the troubles of life made you murmur; and because, in consequence of these things, you did not enjoy so much in the closet as you once did, you have sometimes shrunk from the duty—like a child conscious of a father's displeasure, you have dreaded to meet him alone. You came uneasy to the sanctuary—the word reproved you: you felt displeased with your minister: you could not bear the reflections of conscious guilt, and you did not receive divine truth with your former relish; and most likely you have ventured to think practical sermons legal; and you have attempted to cover your departure from God with the cloak of zeal for the glorious doctrines of grace which you have transformed into the ministers of sin. You find it convenient to talk against holiness, and you hate a law and gospel which condemn your conduct; or if in your backslidings you have not fallen into this snare of the devil, there is in your heart an awful apathy and indifference to the things of God and to the people of God. You began to feel cold in your love to your religious friends, and you fancied they were cold to you. You are estranged from God: the state of your mind and your conduct act reciprocally upon each other; and what will be the end thereof? Let me, O backsliding sinner,

II. Trace your punishment in your crime.

1. Since the world has allured you, what has been its rewards? Has it made you better? Does it not perplex and harrass you? What have you not lost? How many delightful hours of communion with God? To the sweetness of a resigned spirit you are altogether a stranger.

2. Since you have been indifferent to ordinances, what have you gained?

Sermons which your fellow Christians lived upon, were insipid to you; and opportunities that had a blessing in them, you missed.

3. And your loss, with respect to active exertion and growth in grace, is incalculable—your example might have influenced others, your connexions, your relations and friends—you might have enjoyed the blessedness of Him that turneth many to righteousness—that young Christian has been repelled by your coldness, or infected with your spirit—that diseased member of the body that was recovering its strength, saw you absent from the table of the Lord, and this has kept him away.

But let me enumerate the positive evils which are the consequence of backslidings.

1. Backsliding robs us of our evidence that

we are partakers of divine grace. A man that backslides has no reason in that state, to conclude that he is a Christian.

2. It makes work for bitter repentance.

3. If it does not produce repentance, it makes us plunge deeper into the world to get rid of reflection.

What I have mentioned are the certain consequences of backslidings from God. But something more than these may follow.—Backsliding

4. In heart may issue in final apostacy, and will dreadfully aggravate our future misery in eternity.

But, perhaps, some wretched creature who sustains this character, eagerly inquires to know what to do.

Let me leave you with affectionate advice.

1. Do not think slightly of your state. Consider what God was to you. Consider for what you forsook him; and, recollect it was your own voluntary act. See verse 17.

2. We must adopt the same method for our recovery as we adopted when we first commenced a religious course. We must

3. Pray and watch.

4. Be satisfied with nothing short of complete recovery.

But, perhaps, some backsliders before me to-day, are still not conscious of their state. Remember the church of Laodicea, and examine yourselves—you will know it ere long.

This subject administers caution to us all.

Perhaps there may be sinners present, who congratulate themselves that they are not backsliders. For their parts they are not saints—a worthy boast, truly. You *must* be saints, or you *will* be devils.

RUTH I. 16, 17.

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

THERE is every thing in this short history to interest, to captivate the soul. But its sweetest charm is the divine principle of piety which elevates the characters introduced, and sheds an

admirable lustre over their circumstances and their fate. Naomi is a mother in Israel, tried by affliction, deprived of all earthly comforts ; her religion only remains. She is a widow, and she is childless ; but what dignity marks her conduct. Behold the thrice widowed mourner bowing the head and hiding the face in silent grief. She is dumb ; she opens not her mouth, because the Lord hath done it.

Observe her disinterested kindness. She wishes to suffer alone.

Observe her pious wisdom. By criminal silence, by alluring representations, she would not entice her daughters-in-law from their own country to a decided profession of the true religion.

She nobly informs them of all the difficulties they must encounter ;—she tries their sincerity. With pain and regret we behold Orpah returning again. And over how many of the same unsteady yielding character are we often called to weep. But we are struck with the noble firmness of Ruth. She is not to be moved ; her purpose is unalterably fixed—she is decided for the God of Israel, and him she will follow, even to a strange land, encountering poverty, and every thing from which the heart most revolts, for the sake of religion.

Did she act wisely, and is her example worthy of being followed ?

She abandoned a false religion for the true—she left the scene of temptation, that she might

enjoy every help to devotion—she relinquished worldly prospects for a heavenly inheritance.— Presuming, my brethren, that religion is the one thing needful,

Let us consider, in the history and conduct of Ruth, what it is to be religious ; for though we may not be called exactly to struggle with the difficulties and distresses which surrounded her, yet in our measure we must be animated by the same principles, and the influence of these principles must be manifested in our spirit and deportment.

I. We observe, that religion is a matter of choice. Education, circumstances, do not constitute religious character. It supposes that we weigh interfering claims, and that we decide on those which deserve to be preferred.

II. We observe, that religion demands the firmest, the most unwavering resolution : we must not only prefer it, but we must be decided in our preference.

We must not confer with flesh and blood ; and if our resolution be not firm, we shall soon find that we have embraced religion without having counted the cost. Halting between two opinions, is as disgraceful as renouncing piety altogether.

III. We observe, that religion calls for the greatest self-denial—it demands sacrifice ; this

is evident in the conduct of Ruth—she had to snap asunder the most endearing ties, to forget her own relations and her own land, and to become a poor wanderer, and a stranger, while the care of a feeble aged mother-in-law devolved upon her; but some will perhaps ask, was this necessary? Might not Ruth have retained her religion, and yet lived in the land of Moab? Did she not, with all her firmness to her religious principles, forget a part of that duty which the light of nature taught her? Why did she not show some attachment to her own mother, as well as to her mother-in-law? Why did she leave her parents with a determination never to return, that she might go to a land which she knew not? The answer is easy. She saw that she could not return to her mother without exposing herself to very dangerous temptations; she could not, perhaps, have lived in her mother's house without seeing daily homage paid to false gods, and meeting with daily solicitations, and more than solicitations, to join in the practice of abominable idolatries. She might soon have been given in marriage to a worshipper of Chemosh; and it may easily be judged, how little such a convert as Ruth was prepared to encounter the temptations to which she might have been exposed in the house, either of a mother or a husband. She, therefore, forgot her mother's house, and her own people; with a disinterested spirit she embraced and held fast that religion which she had

been taught, not only by her mother-in-law, but by the Spirit of God. Unless she had been drawn by that divine power which alone can change the hearts of men, she would not have come to the Lord's land and to God himself as her exceeding joy.

We are not called, in the literal sense of the words, to forsake our father's house and our own people; yet, in the spiritual sense, it is absolutely necessary. We must be ready to part with every thing for Christ, if we would be Christ's disciples: "For if any man come to him and hate not father, and mother, and brothers, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be one of his disciples."

IV. We observe, that religion requires constant and undeviating perseverance. For a time there appeared no difference between Orpah and Ruth.

But having taken a view of what some may perhaps, call the dark side of religion, we observe, in the

Fifth and last place, that religion remunerates with large rewards.

Godliness is profitable for all things—"thy God shall be my God"—what a portion.

And now, my brethren,

I. When we consider how firmly Ruth was

resolved to cleave to Naomi and to the God of Israel, ought we not to consider whether we, who enjoy so vastly superior advantages to Ruth, are determined, with equal firmness, to continue in the faith, in the possession, and in the practice of our religion?

2. That we may cleave with purpose of heart to the Lord, it is necessary that our hearts be renewed by the grace of God; for never shall we be the true followers of them who left all and followed Christ, unless we are delivered from the remaining power of that attachment to the things of the present world, which renders so many professors of religion so unstable in all their ways. If God puts his fear into our hearts, we shall not depart from him; but if we are left to the natural impulse of our hearts, however amiable our natural dispositions may be, we shall follow the example, not of Ruth, but of Orpah, who kissed and left Naomi.—How lamentable is it that many have a sort of external respect for religion, without the heart decidedly to espouse it.

3. How amiable and lovely is piety in a young woman.

True religion sits well on persons of either sex, and in all situations; but its aspect is peculiarly amiable in a female form, and in particular situations. Youth, beauty, and sorrow united, pre-

sent a most interesting object. A daughter weeping at a parent's tomb—a mother mourning over a babe to which she gave suck, and refusing to be comforted—a widow embracing the urn which contains the ashes of the husband of her youth; in all their afflictions we are afflicted: we cannot refrain from mingling our tears with theirs. Let religion be infused into these lovely forms, and mark how the interest rises—how the frame is embellished—how the deportment is ennobled. The eye of that dutiful child is turned upward; her heart is delivered from oppression; her trembling lips pronounce, “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up—my father who art in heaven.” The mother withdraws from the breathless clay, reconciled to the stroke which bereaved her, “goes her way, and eats bread, and her countenance is no more sad; for her maker has said to her, “Why weepest thou, and why eatest thou not, and why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons?” The widowed mourner gives her mortal interest up, and makes her God her all.

Young woman, whatever thy condition may be; whether thou art in thy father's house, or married to an husband; at home or in a strange land; in society or solitude; followed or neglected, be this thy monitor, this thy guide, this thy refuge—the love of God shed abroad in thy heart; the fear of God, which is the beginning of

wisdom ; “ the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” However easy, gentle, flexible, complying in other respects, where your religious principles—where the testimony of a good conscience—where your duty to your Creator, are concerned, be firm and resolute ; “ be stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

Thus shall youth be guarded, and beauty adorned ; thus shall society be sweetened, and solitude cheered ; thus shall prosperity be sanctified, and adversity soothed ; thus shall life, even to old age and decay, be rendered useful and respectable ; and thus shall death and the grave be stripped of all their terrors.

SOLOMON'S SONG VIII. 5.

*Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness,
leaning upon her beloved ?*

THE Song of Songs, which is Solomon's, from which I have selected my text, probably constitutes a part of the one thousand and five songs which his biographer asserts him to have composed ; and was unquestionably his favourite or happiest performance ; the Hebrew language

duplicating its terms to express superlative excellence. As a poem, it is certainly a composition unrivalled in the richness, beauty, sublimity, and pathos of its descriptions and dialogues. But it has an incomparably higher claim upon our regard when we view it as a divine allegory, written with the pen of inspiration, delineating, under a veil, the bridal union subsisting between Jehovah and his pure and uncorrupted church. Regarded in this view, this admirable poem affords a charming picture of the Jewish and Christian churches; of Jehovah's selection of Israel as a peculiar people from the surrounding nations; of his fervent and permanent love for his elder church, so frequently compared by the Hebrew prophets to that of a bridegroom for his bride; of the beauty, fidelity, and submission of the church in return; and of the call of the gentiles into the pale of his favour, upon the introduction of Christianity, so exquisitely typified under the character of a younger sister destitute, in consequence of the greater simplicity of its worship of those external and captivating attractions which made so prominent a part of the Jewish religion. And not only is this represented by the loves of Solomon and the Shulamite, but the intimate union of Christ, with every individual believer, is also undoubtedly intended and supposed. And it is in this view that I propose to consider the words of the text:—

“ Who is this that cometh up from the wilder-

ness, leaning upon her beloved?" Let us consider what this question implies. The church is here the most prominent object, and we behold her coming up from the wilderness, highly honoured and distinguished by the affectionate solicitude and tenderness of her beloved. She is leaning upon him, and they are walking together enjoying the most familiar intercourse. The text is, probably, a question of admiration. The spectator beholds the king of Zion arrayed in all his heavenly majesty; and he is filled with wonder, to know who it is that he condescends to admit so near to his person, and for whose happiness he appears so tenderly concerned. To compare great things with small—if we saw the sovereign of Britain walking and talking kindly with an individual of inferior rank, and heaping the most distinguishing honours upon him, we should spontaneously inquire, who is the man the king thus delighteth to honour? The text thus considered, would open to us a pleasing and a profitable field of meditation. But I shall not now consider the dignity, the condescension, and the love of Christ to his people, and contrast it with their original meanness, their unworthiness, and their misery; but shall call your attention to the passage, as pointing out the church (including in the term every individual believer).

I. Forsaking her own people and her father's house.

And this intimates to us her *origin*. She was born in the wilderness, in a wilderness of sin and sorrow ; these were her inheritance. Polluted with sin, she mingled with the base-born children of the earth, and drank of their bitter cup ; and, though misery and death were her dismal portion, she seemed well contented with her lot. She loved her father's house and her own people ; they were all united together in a fatal bond of attachment and woe, and they were going fast down to the shades of black despair—they were in the wilderness ; and though it yielded them no supplies, they tried to satisfy themselves with it—it was their native soil, and they had no disposition to forsake it. They were all lingering hard by the avenue, by which, with a single step, the inhabitants of the wilderness have been for ages and generations imperceptibly and thoughtlessly hurried into Tophet. This was the condition of the church of Christ. It was thine, O Christian, and long ere this you would have perished ; but the king of Sion heard of thy calamity—he saw thee in the labyrinth of death—he called thee, but thou wast insensible ; at length he determined to seek thee ; he disguised himself in the form of a servant, and visited thee ; thou hadst no heart to receive him ; there was no beauty or comeliness in him in thy estimation ;—at first, indeed, he alarmed thee ;—escape for thy life, was the language with which he accosted thee, but thou wast not aware of thy

danger till he opened thine eyes ; then thou didst behold and feel thy wretchedness ; but still thou wouldst have lingered in the plain, if he had not subdued thee by love. But his love, that was stronger than death, overcame thee ; and, amidst the derision and scoffs of thy base kindred, he led thee forth out of the wilderness, and ever since, this has been thy song :—

“ Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wand’ring from the fold of God ;
He to rescue me from danger,
Interposed his precious blood.”

Though Christians have the same origin with the men of the world, are partakers of the same nature, and polluted with the same depravity ; and though there was once no characteristic difference between them, yet now there is distinction enough : you see the Christian toiling up hill, leaving the wilderness of this world behind him ; forsaking its vain pleasures and amusements ; coming out from among them bearing the reproach of Christ. And observe the admiration which he excites. Who is this ? exclaim the multitudes of ungodly sinners, and his former wicked companions, as they behold him turning his back on these lying vanities. What art thou also become one of them ? Who is this ? echoes the admiring church. Is Saul also among the prophets ?—Who is this ? rends the hollow caverns of hell, while satan writhes in agony, and

exclaims, I have lost another slave. Who is this? with rapture is inquired among all the ranks of spirits in heaven ; for

“ Pleasure and praise run through God’s host,
To see a sinner turn ;
Then satan has a captive lost,
And Christ a subject born.”

II. But observe, the church not only quits the wilderness—not only forsakes her former evil courses ; but she is advancing to her heavenly residence—she is coming *up* from the wilderness : though humble in spirit, her views are exalted ; and as heaven is the object of her hope, it is also the object of her pursuit. She not only believes that eternal glory is attainable, but she is anxious to obtain it ; and, therefore, she is on her journey to it. Christians are pilgrims, and their example and conduct have always declared, that “ they seek a country that is a heavenly.”

The Christian life is *progressive* ; the believer advances step by step, till he is made meet for his heavenly inheritance ; he recedes from the world—in its *spirit*—in its *maxims*—in his *pursuits* ; he advances in *knowledge*, in *experience*, and in *holiness*. As he proceeds in the divine life, and ascends the hill, his horizon enlarges ; his eye takes in a more extensive range ; or, in other words, the mind being employed about divine things, expands. There is in celestial ob-

jects a distinctness and a glory which he did not at first discover ; and he perceives that they multiply as he advances. So in his experience he grows ; he is more acquainted with his dangers ; understands more clearly the map of the way ; is aware of the difficulties, and knows where to derive support and comfort. And observe, he grows in holiness ; the nearer he approaches heaven, the more fit he is to enjoy it ; his graces are matured, his faith is lively, his hope is a good hope, his love is ardent, he is ripe for immortality, and is eager to depart. Some arrive at their journey's end more rapidly than others ; but all believers are growing, are increasing, are advancing. They may experience temporary hindrances ; they may sometimes lose their way ; and their steps they must retrace with bitter remorse ; but they are all coming up *out* of the wilderness. You see none of Christ's disciples contented to remain below. They are not mingling with the follies of the wilderness, nor are they satisfied with its fruits. Heaven is their home, and thither they are tending.—But again,

III. Behold the church, coming up from the wilderness, and on her journey to her celestial residence, is supported by her heavenly friend. “ Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness, *leaning* upon her beloved ? ”

When we look within us, and see our own depravity and weakness ; when we look around us,

and behold the strength and the number of our enemies ; when we look forward to the difficulties and dangers of the road through which we must pass in our way to glory, well may we say, “ Who is sufficient for these things ? ” What we have to contend with would exhaust the strength of an angel ; but, blessed be God, we have more than an angel’s strength : we are supported by the omnipotent arm of a God ; and the God who supports us, has as much tenderness as he has power. He has said, “ I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee ; ” and he is faithful, that has promised. The Lord is our righteousness and strength ; in every age the church has been supported by her beloved. In the sea of persecution she has been tempest driven, but never wrecked ; for he has rebuked the storm. Against the sun of prosperity he has interposed as the shadow of a great rock, and he has kindly supported every individual with as much solicitude as the whole.

If the Christian live, it is Christ that liveth in him ; if he walk, it is by faith in Christ, which draws virtue out of him ; if he fight and conquer, he is more than a conqueror, through him that loved him. If he rise out of temptation unhurt, it is because the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation. If he is a victor over death, it is because death was the last enemy which Jesus destroyed. If his body rest in hope, it is because Jesus has embalmed

the grave, and said to corruption, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther." O, how the Christian is to be envied; if the men of the world are wearied and sick of care, they lean on a reed, and it pierces their hand; but the Christian leans on his beloved, and enjoys repose. The feet of the sinner stumble on the dark mountains, and he falls to rise no more, for he is without a guide; but the Christian walks securely amidst snares and difficulties, for his Lord is with him, knows all that he shall meet with, and who will hold him up that he may be safe.

My brethren, we should soon tire, and die, if we had to come up out of the wilderness alone; "but the Lord is with me," may the Christian say, "therefore I will not fear the power of any adversary." But observe,

IV. Again, the church is not only supported, but comforted; she leans upon her *beloved*. John was the beloved disciple, and he enjoyed this privilege when his master was on earth; but every disciple is beloved now, and we are all invited to enjoy sweet intercourse with our Lord. Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed; but where there is a perfect agreement, a union of sentiment and feeling, they not only walk together, but they enjoy sweet communion—and to walk in company is always considered as a token of friendship;—thus, in walking with Christ, and leaning upon him, the believer

has the sweetest enjoyment. Still, it must be acknowledged, that this is not always possessed. It is a common observation, that a Christian is always supported, but not always comforted. But may we not ask, is there not a cause? If we will walk with the perverseness of children, we ought to expect the frowns of a father. If we had always a disposition to lean on Christ, if we had no rebellious wish, no opposition of views and pursuits, we should always enjoy.

But sin often destroys our comfort—we are prone to forsake the God we love; and if he did not stretch forth the arm which we reject, we must inevitably fall. But though we often let him go, he will not suffer us to depart; yet, he will punish us, he will hide himself from us; but, blessed be his name, he does not utterly forsake us. He always holds out his arm, though his face is sometimes hidden in a cloud. And when we are brought to a sense of our folly and our wretchedness, he smiles upon us in love. O, how delightful is it to walk in this world, beholding the reconciled countenance of our adorable Saviour. This turns every thorn we meet with in our path, into a rose: in the enjoyment of it, we exclaim,

“ Trials and troubles are all slight,
And pain is sweet, afflictions light,
Come whatsoever will.”

This may appear enthusiasm to the world;

but it is the Christian's joy, with which a stranger intermeddleth not ; Christ does manifest himself to his people as he does not unto the world ; and the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.

There is, in fact, no real pleasure in religion, but as it flows from the Lord Jesus Christ. If we view our duties with complacency, and if we transform our privileges into fountains, when they are only to be considered as streams, our rejoicing is not good. But happy is the man that rejoiceth in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh. Let this, then, be our song in the house of our pilgrimage :—

“ If Jesus will assist me, I
Will leaning on him live and die,
And great the blessing count.
My life, dear Lord, I'd live to Thee,
My death should also glorious be,
Like Moses on the mount.”

And this leads to a

Fifth observation — “ Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness, leaning on her beloved ? ” It is the church of Jesus breathing the ardour of her attachment to him.

Whatever may be a Christian's views and feelings, and however trying his circumstances, he can appeal to his Saviour, and say, “ Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love

thee." There is no religion without love. Love is the fulfilling of the law. To those that believe, Christ is precious. Here the church is represented as leaning on her beloved; and we may observe, that her love is *supreme, constant, and striking*.

1. That it is supreme, who will question?

She forsakes the world—she comes forth from the wilderness—she abandons every other portion, and cleaves to Christ alone. See, there is none to divide her heart; Christ and his cross are all the world to her; and does not this comport with the nature of this sublime attachment? Christ says, "Give me thy heart;" the believer replies, "It is thine, Lord; I surrender it cheerfully. Sway thou the sceptre over it. I charge ye my affections, that ye wander not from my love." The Christian views so much excellency, glory, and loveliness in his Redeemer, that he cannot transfer his affections till he behold an object more excellent, more glorious, more lovely. And thus, his love is

2. Constant—it is not the impression of the hour—it is not the warmth of passion; but his love to his Redeemer is a divine principle, and it is immortal; it is true as the needle to the pole; if it be shaken for a moment by the gusts of temptation, it reverts again to the point from which it can never deviate; and as a proof of the

intenseness and constancy of his love, the believer's chief misery arises from the powerful conviction, that he does not love enough.

Oh ! how grossly do you delude yourselves, that make your hearts dens of pride, filthy lusts, malice, and envy, and thousands of vanities, and yet think to find a corner in them to lodge Christ too. Truly, you would both straighten him in room and give him very bad neighbours. No—they that think not a whole heart too little for him, shall never enjoy him. The love of a Christian to his Saviour is,

3. *Striking*—it arrests the attention of all ; they take knowledge of him ; they see what sacrifices he endures ; they hear him triumphantly declare, “ What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”

My brethren, how doubtful is their religion of whom the world doubts whether they love Christ or not.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. Behold with admiration the dignified condescension of the Lord Jesus ; how sweetly does he exemplify the character of the true Messiah,

which is delineated in the Prophets: "He gathers the lambs in his arms, and gently leads those that are with young."

2. We may here examine the state of our hearts, in order to decide our state before God.

3. What gratitude, love, and admiration, should fill their souls, who lean upon their beloved, and who are about to sit down with him at his table! We sometimes are called to rest by the way.

JOHN XXI. 18, 19.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

THE fall of Simon Peter is one of the most affecting and instructive events upon sacred record.

It tarnishes the finest character—is an abrupt violation of all our confidence in friendship, in gratitude, in sincerity ; it exhibits the near connexion there is between weakness and wickedness ; it teaches us to cease from man—from ourselves—from others.

The recovery of Simon Peter is one of the most glorious illustrations of divine compassion and power ; it shows us what *forgiveness* there is in Christ, what he *can* pardon. In the time and manner of it, it displays the deep sympathy, the matchless and the mighty energy of that love which looks, and it is done ; which, with a glance of the eye, accomplishes all its purpose.

Our text is part of our Lord's first address to Peter after his recovery, and subsequent to his own resurrection.

The address is

Inquisitive—imperative—predictive—and consolatory.

From the text, we learn that Simon Peter is

I. To follow his master.

II. To glorify God.

III. To glorify him in old age ; and to

IV. Glorify him especially by his death.

I. The apostle is here commanded to follow.

Christ ; the phrase is figurative—it implies, on the part of the Saviour,

Guidance—example—and perfection in both.

On the part of the disciple, docility, imitation, and progressive advancement. He follows—that is, he learns—he follows :—he approximates. He follows ; but at how great a distance—what a striking difference between the original and the copy !

In thus following Christ, the apostle was to

II. Glorify God ; God is glorified in the

1. Homage paid to his son.

2. By the illustration of his moral perfections in the Christian character.

3. The existence, progress, and full development of this character, is especially glorious to the freeness and energy of his grace.

4. The apostolic office blended with this character afforded the most glorious manifestation of the purposes and results of his love to the whole universe. But Simon Peter is destined to glorify God

III. In old age.

Here it is intimated that he is to live long ; and that he is to fall no more. Long life is not

in itself a privilege ; the infirmities of age are many—great—and distressing. Yet, to live a long life of piety—of usefulness ; to grow old and to ripen as we grow—this is delightful. Some, indeed, are honoured, by Divine mercy, with an early heaven—they condense the knowledge, the labours, the usefulness of threescore years and ten into a third of that period :—

“ O, there was *One**—on earth awhile
He dwelt : but transient as a smile
That turns into a tear ;
His beauteous image passed us by ;
He came like lightning from the sky,
He seemed as dazzling to the eye,
As prompt to disappear.”

When old age is found in the path of religion, especially when the course is begun in early life, it affords the impressive spectacle of maturity of Christian excellence—of knowledge—of experience—of character.

In the apostle's protracted age, God was glorified ; for amidst growing and fearful degeneracy of doctrine and practices, he remained a witness, an oracle, and an example ; a radiant specimen of what his Master was, and true Christianity is.

But Peter was destined to

* Spencer.

IV. Glorify God by his death.

Death is the sincere hour. It brings our principles and hopes to the test. The Christian who dies in purity and in peace, reflects a peculiar glory upon religion—teaches survivors its infinite value ; for then he knows, feels, and enjoys its worth.

But Peter was to glorify God by a death of violence, of excruciating suffering, and when he was tottering under the infirmities of age.

Martyrdom is a most impressive attestation of the sincerity of the sufferer ; in the apostle's case it was a striking evidence of the truth of Christianity. In his case the world was taught, not only that the gospel was divine, but that it was infinitely superior to all the possessions and all the enjoyments of time ; that life itself without it, was valueless and undesirable.

It proved also what the gospel can enable its votaries to suffer ; and as voluntary sufferings sustained in such a cause give prominence to principle, and energy to virtue, they glorify God.

It is our duty to follow Christ.

The end of our creation and new creation is to glorify God.

We are to glorify him in youth, in matured life, and in old age.

We are to glorify him in death.

Death will soon seize us as his victims. We

shall be martyrs to his power ; but let us conquer him through the dear might of him who hath loved us.

Many live without object—without God, and without Christ in the world.

What arrears of glory have you to pay ?

PROVERBS XIII. 15.

The way of transgressors is hard.

IT is an objection often brought against religion, that it is a hard service—that it requires sacrifices incompatible with happiness—that all its enjoyments are future ; and that to be blessed in eternity, religious persons consent to be miserable in time. But pray, who has drawn this picture of religion ? her associates, acquaintances, and friends ? No ; listen—every one of them testifies, “ that her ways are ways of pleasantness, and that her paths are paths of peace.” You will hear them with united voice declare, that “ godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come.”

But let us examine the ways of those who bring such serious charges against religion, who

are altogether strangers to its nature and its joys; and we shall find no reason to envy them, even supposing (which is utterly false) that their character of religion is a just one; even then, good men have an infinite advantage over wicked men; for if it be true that religion makes a man miserable now to make him happy hereafter, religious people are partakers of happiness at last; but this cannot be said of its adversaries. "The way of transgressors is hard;" they are miserable in time, and will be damned in eternity; they are even disappointed now; and if they vainly dream of heaven, they will be awfully disappointed at last. Whatever these persons may say of religion, however they may deride it and its votaries, they are by no means competent judges. The testimony of universal experience is against them. But while we charge misery upon them, as the legitimate offspring of depravity, we stand on high ground; before conversion, many of us were in the secret. We know that sin has no lasting, no solid joys, while it has a thousand real pains; and it is a truth, as clear as the sun-beam, that the way of those who are destitute of piety is full of briars and thorns.

In farther discoursing from these words, we shall illustrate their truth in a series of observations.

I. The way of transgressors is hard, as it often tends to penury and want.

It is true, that many of God's people themselves are poor ; but theirs is a sanctified poverty. The poverty of the wicked is abject and miserable ; it is a poverty often brought upon themselves by their indolence, their love of pleasure, and their wickedness. Religion promotes industry, industry gains respect, respect gains recommendation, recommendation gains business, business gains wealth ; and thus religion of itself naturally leads to prosperity. But, on the contrary, vice promotes idleness, idleness brings reproach, reproach cuts off recommendation, and want of recommendation stagnates business ; and thus a wretched poverty often falls to the lot of the ungodly. Could we enter into the abodes of thousands, and ask what has clothed their children with rags ? What has caused them to part with their furniture ? What has painted misery in their countenances, and rendered them destitute of the comforts of life ? What, if the truth were spoken, would be the answer ? Was it religion ? Was it honesty ? Was it temperance ? Was it industry that did all this ? No ; it was the want of these. It was imprudence—it was indolence—it was vice—that led to these dreadful scenes : “ Surely, the way of transgressors is hard.”

II. To what disgrace does it often reduce mankind.

A wicked man, it is said, is loathsome, and cometh to shame. Sin may promise much, but

her steps are marked with infamy. She leads in a flowery path, but it is the path of disgrace. She points, indeed, to the temple of honour, but her votaries return with shame.

The Divine Being so hates sin, that he is determined no honour shall be attached to that which so dishonours him. Who is he that blushes? Who is he that is ashamed? Who is he that skulks in obscurity, and is doomed to dwell in the shades of infamy and contempt? Who is he that every one distrusts? Who is avoided as a walking pestilence, as a living hell? Is it the man of virtue, of probity, of religion? No; it is the sinner—it is he who has offended God, and violated the laws of conscience and of truth. “Surely, the way of transgressors is hard.”

III. To what pain of body does this often bring a man. Ah, what a host of diseases do gluttony, drunkenness, indolence, disorder, and inordinate pleasure, quarter upon a man! Religion saves from all these, for the fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but wickedness shortens them, and not only shortens them, but fills them with bitterness and woe. Those trembling hands, that shaking head, those disjointed knees, that extinguished resolution, that feeble memory, that worn-out brain, that body all infection and putrefaction,—these are the dreadful rewards which the devil bestows on those for whom he is preparing himself, shortly, to exercise all his

fury and rage. “Surely, the way of transgressors is hard.”

IV. What anxiety and mental distress does it produce! Adam flies, Achan turns pale, Belshazzzer trembles, Saul despairs, Judas hates existence, and hurries out of life. “Yea, the wicked even flee when no man pursueth.” Could we penetrate the heart of a sinner, what misery should we find there! What, but a book, on every page of which is written, lamentation, mourning, and woe!—What, but a fountain from whence none but bitter streams continually flow!—What, but a den of savage beasts of prey, tearing and devouring, tormenting and destroying, till, at last, nothing but ruin and death appear. Ah, conscience! how dost thou rack the sinner, sting his guilty soul, witness against his crimes, and treasure up the remembrance of them to his confusion! “Surely, the way of transgressors is hard.”

V. To what temporal calamities have such been exposed. It is not for us, indeed, to be rash in pronouncing judgment even on the wicked; but let us look for a moment at a few instances of God's wrath and displeasure:—yonder is one turned into a pillar of salt—here is another struck with the leprosy, and become white as snow. On this side, one falls down dead with horror; on that, another seeks destruction from

his sword ; one is smote by an angel, and eaten up of worms ; another is instantly consumed by devouring flames. What an awful catalogue do the Scriptures produce ! On what monuments this epitaph may be written—" The way of transgressors is hard."

VI. Such are exposed to the wrath of God in a future state—" The wicked shall go away to everlasting punishment."

Say not, then, O sinner, that your life is a life of pleasure, and your death a death of triumph ; that God is to be discarded, religion despised, and the soul neglected ; for on thy conscience now, on thy countenance in the day of judgment, and on the gates of hell for ever shall this sentence be written :—

" The way of transgressors is hard."

From the whole, learn

1. The evil of sin.
2. The necessity of repentance.
3. The benevolent design of that system which saves men from these miseries.

I TIMOTHY II. 5.

*There is one God, and one mediator between
God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

MAN is, by nature, in a state of enmity with God ; he hates and abhors him. This is a truth clearly revealed to us in the Scriptures, and every hour confirmed by the conduct of mankind. It is, however, a truth which man is unwilling to acknowledge : in opposition to the testimony of the spirit, he boldly denies the charge : declares, that he is free from aggravated guilt, and professes to honour and love the living God ; but how easily and how fatally does man deceive himself, and how easily is his self-deception sometimes detected !—Exhibit to his view the living God, not as he is represented by the world, but as he has represented himself in his word.—Exhibit to the view of the sinner—not the god he has made for himself the creature of his depraved imagination—but the God of Heaven, the God of the Bible, and then ask him, whether he loves such a Being as this ? What is his answer ? It betrays at once the natural enmity of his heart ; it proves, that were he able, he would hurl such a Being as the God of the Bible from

heaven, and place the creature of his own imagination on his throne.

And how does a holy and just God regard a race of sinners, rebels against his government, persevering and obstinate violators of his most righteous laws? Sin is an abomination in his sight; on sinners he has pledged himself to pour the vials of his tremendous wrath. As the moral Governor of the universe, as a Being of veracity and truth, he must award to the transgressors all that he has denounced against their sins. This is the relation in which God stands to sinners, and in which sinners stand to God; they are, in nature, and principles, and conduct, diametrically opposed to each other. There is no congeniality, but absolute contrariety between them. God is angry with the wicked every day. The carnal mind is enmity against God.

If, then, there is between man and his Creator hatred and enmity, before we can be happy in the presence or kingdom of God, we must be reconciled to him and he to us; we must become his friends, and he our reconciled God. A peace-maker must be found, a mediator must be procured, and such a mediator is revealed to us in the words of the text:—

“There is one God,” &c. Let us, then, examine the qualifications of this Mediator? Let us inquire, whether the man Christ Jesus is able to be a peace-maker between us and our offended God? Whether we may venture to trust to him

the work of mediation?—And may the Holy Spirit open our eyes, that we may behold our King in his beauty, and learn more and more to love him, to rejoice in him, to make him our all in all.

I. To qualify an individual to be a peacemaker between two persons in a state of enmity with each other, he must, in some degree, be concerned for the good of both the parties, and desirous to promote it; he must be a mutual and impartial friend. And has not the Saviour this qualification of a mediator? Is he not interested for the good of his heavenly Father? He is the only begotten son of God. The glory of his Father is infinitely dear to his heart, and it is his first, his great concern to increase and promote it. And is he not equally interested in the welfare of his people, as nearly connected with them? Our faithless hearts, indeed, sometimes conceive of him, as more concerned for his Father's glory than for our salvation; but in this we dishonour him, and sin against him. True, the Almighty is his Father, but are not we his brethren? He is the son of God, but is he not also the son of man? True, he is one with the Father, but is he not also one with us? Are we not as closely united to him, as he himself is united with the Father? Is he not the vine, and we the branches? Is he not the head, and we the members? Let us, then, acknowledge in him this requisite of a me-

diator, impartiality—a strong and equal regard for both the parties.

II. A successful mediator must further possess the confidence of both the parties he has undertaken to reconcile. Both of these must think him worthy of being trusted before they will commit their different and opposing interests into his hands. Such a mediator is the man Christ Jesus. God has thought him worthy to be entrusted with whatsoever relates to his interests or his honour. He has committed all judgment unto the Son, and has given him authority to execute it. Yea, before the foundations of the world, he committed into his hands the salvation of his people. His they were, but he gave them to his Son, to be again presented to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

And is he not also worthy of the confidence of his people? Has he not been equally confided in by them? Thousands and tens of thousands of perishing sinners have rejoiced to commit themselves, their bodies, and their souls, their all into his hands.

There never yet has been one found in his church who refused to trust him,—one who was not persuaded that his Saviour was able to keep to all eternity that which he had committed unto him. O, then, let us confide in Jesus!—how much sœever we commit to him will be safe—

whatsoever we trust in any other hands will be lost.

III. Another qualification required in a successful mediator is, considerable influence over both the parties at enmity. He must be one who has some power over them, one who can induce them to submit to his decisions: and is not this qualification also to be found in Jesus? Is he not a powerful mediator? Can he not prevail with God? “Father, I will,” is his language to him, and his will is done. The Almighty heareth the Saviour always, and nothing can he propose to him to which he will not accede. He can obtain from him whatever terms of reconciliation he thinks just. And has he no influence with the other party—sinful men? Ask the Christian, and he will say, that were not Jesus a mighty Saviour, he should never have been a believer in his name. He will say, that the work which has been wrought in his heart, is a work which nothing but Omnipotence could perform. He was once unwilling to be reconciled to God on the terms proposed to him; but the Saviour made him willing, sweetly yet powerfully influenced him to accept the proffered grace, and become the friend of God. And he can do with his people according to the good pleasure of his will; he can make them go in the paths of the Lord’s commandments, and cause them to walk in his statutes. Let us, then, my brethren, regard

this mighty Mediator as one able to save to the uttermost.

Are you asking for any spiritual gift, or precious blessing? and are you tempted to think it too great or excellent for you? Think of the power of the Mediator—remember the influence which the ascended Jesus has with the Father, and trust to him to obtain the desired blessing for you. He can obtain the greatest and the richest spiritual treasure that would, indeed, be a blessing to you, with as much ease as he can obtain the smallest temporal good.

Are you grieved on account of your remaining corruptions? Think of your mighty Mediator! Remember how much influence he has over the hearts of his people, and intreat him to exercise that influence on you. Think what he has done for you already, and let this encourage you to ask him to do more.

IV. A successful mediator between parties that are much incensed, must further be of a patient and persevering disposition. No difficulties, however insurmountable they may appear, must intimidate him—nothing that he may suffer even from the parties themselves—no exertions of others to prolong the contest must discourage or prevent him from following after the things which make for peace. And where shall we find this patience and perseverance, this qualification of a peace-maker, if we do not find it in

the mediator between God and men. How many and how great the difficulties which appeared in the way of reconciliation between the Lord and his sinful people ! The work seemed utterly impossible even for Omnipotence to effect ; yet, with an undaunted courage, the man Christ Jesus undertook to accomplish it, and did not leave it till his shout of victory was heard : “ It is finished.” “ I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” No sooner did he come forward as the mediator, than he endured the wrath of both the parties he had undertaken to reconcile. It pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief. He heard the appalling command given from the throne of the Lord of Hosts, “ Awake ! O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow ;” and it drew from him tears of anguish : it made drops of blood start from every pore of his agonized body. He heard the command, but it did not shake him from his purpose. He re-echoed the mandate, “ Smite the shepherd.” “ Father, not my will, but thine be done.” “ I must reconcile man to Thee, and though thy justice may constrain thee to pour out upon me the vials of thy wrath, I will bear it all. I will tread the wine-press, though alone my arm shall bring salvation. Thy enemies shall be made thy friends ; and though I pour out my soul unto death, I will finish the work. If the cup of bitterness may

not pass from me except I drink it, I am content. Father, not my will, but thine be done."

And what was the treatment which the heavenly Mediator received from the other party he was seeking to reconcile? Was he received by them with thankfulness and kindness? He came unto his own, and his own received him not. No sooner had he assumed the office of their mediator with God, than they sought to slay him; they despised and rejected him, they oppressed and afflicted him. And what effect had this treatment on him? Did it make him give up at once the ungrateful race to deserved vengeance? Did it daunt his courage, and make him despair of accomplishing the work?—Nay, it increased his zeal, it inflamed his ardour in the cause of reconciliation. The disobedience of the people only made him stretch forth his hands unto them all the day long. It only made him shed tears of pity over them—it only made him more earnest in beseeching them to be reconciled to their God. In short, nothing from God, nothing from man, nothing from a tempting enemy, could dismay the heart of our Mediator, our Redeemer. He did not fail, neither was he discouraged, till he set judgment on the earth, and made the isles wait for his law. Think, then, my brethren, you who have come to this Jesus; think of the patience and perseverance of your

Mediator, and let the reflection cheer your hearts.

Your ascended Saviour can bear with infirmities in his people, can bear with and pity infirmities in you: do not tempt him, do not abuse his goodness, his meekness, and his gentleness; but never think that you can weary him with mediating between you and God; he may have appeased the anger of the Lord against you a thousand times already; but he is willing to appease it a thousand times more. The patience that he manifested on earth, he has carried with him to his Father's throne; and he ever lives to exercise it for you. He died once only for your sins, but he ever liveth to make intercession for you; although he is no longer dying, he is still mediating: and as often as you provoke the Lord to anger, he is ready at your request and on your repentance to turn that anger away—to say to his Father, “Spare my people, O Lord, spare them; deal not with them after their sins, neither reward them according to their iniquities.” You may dishonour Christ, you may offend and weary him, by refusing to avail yourselves of his mediation; but you will never offend nor grieve him by employing him as your peace-maker with the Father.

Are you tempted to think you have provoked him, by your sins, to cease from obtaining peace for you? Think again of his patience, and turn to him with weeping, with prayer, and with faith:

and however changeable you may be, you will find him to be the same yesterday, to-day and for ever.

Such, then, is the character of the mediator between God and us, the man Christ Jesus. He possesseth these and all other qualifications for his office, which our guilty situation and the holiness of the Almighty have rendered necessary. The interest of both parties is equally dear to him; he possesses in an equal degree the utmost confidence of both—he has with both a great and prevailing influence—he is a patient and persevering mediator.

What a source of consolation is such a Being to us! What a fountain of peace and joy! Oh, let us strive to know more and more of this peace-maker; for the more we know of him, the more we shall love him, admire him, and rejoice in him.

Ignorance of the extent and value of the mediation of the Saviour, is one great reason why so many who ought to sing aloud for joy, go mourning all the days of their life; they have near them a well of consolation, but they will not give themselves the trouble to seek it.

Strive, then, to increase your knowledge of Christ, of the freeness and the fulness of his love; and in proportion to the degree of your knowledge, will be the degree of your confidence and your peace. They who know but little of Christ, derive but little pleasure from him; they who

know much of him, are filled with all joy and peace in believing.

But do not be content with employing Christ as your mediator, and rejoicing in him ; strive to resemble him : you cannot become, it is true, mediators between God and men, but you may become peace-makers between man and man. Prove, then, that you are interested in the mediation of Christ, by following after those things which make for peace.

Bear one another's burthens—love as brethren—be pitiful, be courteous, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

But it is not to the believer alone that the subject we have been considering, speaks ; it has for the broken-hearted sinner a voice of comfort. You are convinced of your enmity towards your God—you feel how much you have hated him ; the thought of this cuts you to the soul ; you would give all that you possess, if you could but be reconciled to him, and be restored to his friendship.

Are these the feelings of any sinner in this house of prayer ? Is reconciliation with God the first wish of your hearts ? Then know that God is ready to be reconciled to you, has made the first advance, has appointed one to mediate between you and him, is ready to accept of whatever terms this Mediator may propose. This Mediator now comes to you, and intreats you, with the voice of love, to accept him as

your friend ; he intreats you to suffer him to make your God your friend. He tells you how well qualified he is to reconcile ; he tells you on what easy terms he can effect the work : all he wants of you is to accept him as your mediator, to commit your cause into his hands ; you have only to permit him to do what he will for you, and the work is done.

But do you reject him ? There is one mediator, and there is but one.

Hardened sinners hitherto at enmity with God,

What think you of your state ?

What think you of Christ ?

DEUTERONOMY XXXII. 4.

He is the Rock, his work is perfect : for all his ways are judgment : a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

THE text contains an important, instructive, and interesting description of the Almighty ; it describes his nature—his work—and his ways.

I. The description of his nature embraces

1. His holiness, "without iniquity"—every attribute of Deity is complete in itself, without deficiency, without redundancy. Holiness is abstract purity of moral nature, and exists in God in a perfect fulness of glory, without the possibility of deterioration: we ought to view this attribute in reference to the Being—the continuance and the pardon of sin. By neither of these, or all of these together, is his holiness either sullied or impeached.

2. His truth: "God of truth," integrity of character—accuracy of revelation. With this God we may contrast, the absurd mythologies of heathenism—the fables and falsehoods of superstition—with all the illusions and extravagancies of fanaticism. In the light of his glory we may detect all these; and in the confidence that he is and that he reveals truth, we may confound them.

3. His justice is the expression and display of holiness in the divine government. We should view this in reference to his claims on the children of men—his treatment of them here—and the final awards by which he fixes their destiny hereafter.

4. His impenetrability—the unchangeableness and the perpetuity of his being. "He is the rock:" this should be viewed in reference to his ene-

mies—to the fluctuations of the present state—in connexion with our hopes of future blessedness.

II. The Almighty is here described as to his work—it is perfect. This comprehends

Perfection of purpose,

Of design,

Of execution.

It comprehends all the works of Deity: creation — redemption — providence: the two former of these are already complete; of the other, we are not to judge by the evils with which sin has obscured the Divine procedure—by uncertain and imperfect light, nor prematurely

III. Of his ways: “his ways are judgment.” He acts according to unerring judgment, and by a rule that is free from obliquity. This should be viewed in reference to the confusions, the distractions, and the innumerable instances of oppression and undeserved calamity which his government permits, and sometimes appears to sanction and to perpetuate.

Let us ever view the Almighty through a just medium.

Let us adore and magnify his glorious name.

Let us labour to make him known.

MATTHEW XVIII. 14.

It is not the will of your Father, which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

OUR afflictions are to be appreciated, not by the sufferings they occasion, but by the advantages they confer; they are not good in themselves, but they frequently are beneficial in their effects. At the time, they “are not joyous but grievous; yet, afterwards, they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness.” One important benefit which results from them is, that they teach us the value of the scriptures, by affording us an experience of their mighty efficacy in supporting and soothing the heart under every species and degree of calamity. When at ease, we may form sufficiently correct ideas of this efficacy, and firmly believe, that in every trial we may be doomed to suffer, it will operate according to our most sanguine hopes; but when we are placed in circumstances which bring it to the test, speculation becomes confirmed persuasion, and belief rises to assured certainty. The word of God is thus not only approved by our judgments, but it is likewise endeared to our

hearts. It was esteemed before, on account of what it might do in the alleviation of sorrow ; we value it now on account of what it has done in our individual case. Among the many painful events of human life, the loss of children is one of the most distressing. The anguish of a parent so bereaved no sympathy can reach. It is a bitterness which only the parent knows. Numerous alleviating considerations might be suggested by reason, but they are rejected. Rachael mourns for her children, and refuses to be comforted. Religion, and religion alone, has power to command the rebellious sorrow into quiet acquiescence, and to administer consolation which even more than compensates the loss sustained. It represents God as the father of our children, as having an infinite claim to dispose of them according to the pleasure of his own will, and as determining their happiness beyond the power of interruption or miscarriage, by calling them to repose their infant spirits on his paternal bosom. Nor is this a consolation peculiar to pious parents : *all*, whatsoever their characters may be, whose children die in infancy, have this declaration to assuage the wounds inflicted by the heart-rending separation : “ It is not the will of our Father, who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

I take my stand on the ground of this broad assertion. I affirm the complete happiness of all who are summoned out of this world in a

state of infancy; and as this is a declaration which the ignorant misapprehend, I shall, in the

Ist Place, clear it from the difficulties with which it may be associated in their minds.

II. As it involves a statement which the abettors of a gloomy system have denied, I shall, secondly, reply to the objections which they have urged against it.

III. As it opens a prospect which every benevolent Christian hopes to realize, I shall, in the third place, furnish him with arguments in its favour.

1. Let me clear the doctrine which I have asserted from the difficulties with which it is associated in the minds of some well-meaning, but ignorant persons.

They would wish to believe this assertion in its fullest extent; but they know not how to reconcile it with many important doctrines of religion, which they have not only held sacred, but which are clearly revealed in the Scriptures.

The salvation of two-thirds of every generation of mankind (for this is the proportion of those who die without having committed actual sin), does by no means militate against

1. The doctrine of original and universal depravity. These two facts perfectly agree and harmonize; for infants do not enter heaven because they have not participated in a sinful nature; their death proves this lamentable truth. It is, however, important, that we should entertain just notions of that guilt and corruption which Adam has entailed upon all his posterity. Only one act of disobedience is imputed to them in virtue of the federal relation in which they stand to their first progenitor, and the depravity which they receive from him is rather of a negative than of a positive kind. "In order to account for a sinful corruption of nature," says that great divine, President Edwards, "there is not the least need of supposing any evil quality infused, implanted, or wrought into the nature of man, by any positive cause or influence whatsoever. The absence of positive good principles, and so the withholding of a special divine influence to maintain these good principles, leaving the common natural principles of self-love, natural appetite, &c. (which were in man in innocence); leaving these, I say, to themselves, will certainly be followed with the total corruption of the heart, without any positive influence at all; and it was thus, indeed, that corruption of nature came on Adam immediately on his fall, and comes on all his posterity as sinning in him and falling with him." In this view of the subject,

there is nothing incompatible with the idea, that all who die in infancy are for ever happy.

2. Again, this implies no reflection on the sovereignty of God, nor does it impeach the doctrine of election.

Divine sovereignty is only exercised in mercy. It is totally excluded from every act of judicial condemnation. It is not sovereignty that sentences the children of wrath, and inflicts upon them their dreadful doom ; no, this is justice. Election is not reprobation, it is the election of grace. Sinners are finally condemned, not because they were not elected, but because of their sinfulness and impenitence. God always assigns a reason for punishing men ; it is only when he exercises sovereign clemency in the selection of the objects of his love, that he gives no account of his matters, and wraps himself in awful mystery. From mistaken notions there are many who shudder at this doctrine ; they think that it limits the Divine mercy and circumscribes the number of the redeemed. But there are as many saved on this principle as on any other. Let Arminianism open wide the doors of heaven ; let it give entrance to its willing multitudes who believe in Jesus, are justified by his merits, and sanctified by his grace ; its proud boast, that it is more liberal than the system to which it is opposed, amounts to nothing. *The*

results are the same on both systems. Only when the mighty throng take their various stations around the throne, Calvinism, in the language of an inspired apostle, exclaims, "For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate: whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." It is certain that this doctrine, as I have now stated it, is contained in the Scriptures, and occupies a very prominent place in the discourses of our Saviour, and in the writings of his apostles.

If it be asked, why it pleased God to select some only of mankind as vessels of mercy, I honestly answer, I know not. God has, doubtless, wise, but to us, inconceivable ends to accomplish by this procedure. Of this I am persuaded, it was not through want of efficacy in Christ's atonement—it was not owing to any impotency of Divine grace—it was not for want of compassion in God; least of all could it be from any pleasure the Deity could receive from the miseries of his creatures. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." The salvation of all infants is part of the election of grace; they are included in that decree, and interested in all its blessings; their not being comprehended in it would form, in my mind, an irresistible argument against it. But in this view of it, I perceive that it is arrayed

in all the grandeur which is worthy of the infinite Majesty when he condescends to exercise clemency.

3. The doctrine for which I am contending does not set at nought the merits of Christ, or the work of the Holy Spirit; on the contrary, it is founded upon them. Christ becomes the federal head of infants who die; and as in Adam they die, so in Christ are they made alive: the whole of his obedience is imputed to them for righteousness; and that holy influence which alone can make them meet for the inheritance of saints in light, is infused into them as they take their departure to the world of glory. Regeneration in the hearts of adults is an incipient seminal principle; it is sown in the heart as seed is sown in the ground; it is not procured by any act of our own, and it manifests itself by expansion, by breaking forth in faith, in love and holiness. Thus it is imparted to infants, and thus are they prepared for its perfect developement in heaven. What a glory does this reflect on the atonement and righteousness of our Redeemer! How honourable is it to the grace and virtue of the Holy Spirit!

4. This doctrine, so far from opposing, leaves in full force the declaration, that without faith it is impossible to please God, and that faith and repentance are necessary parts of our salvation.

If passages asserting this, were applicable to those who die in infancy, they would go the full length of proving, that *all* must inevitably perish—that the death of an infant is the seal of his reprobation, because it is not in his power to repent or to believe. Dreadful perversion of the charter of Mercy to mankind! Though infants are not capable of rational acts, they have the capacity of happiness and misery. Introduced into a world of vision and enjoyment, where their faculties are matured, they could well appreciate salvation, and pour their sublime hosannahs to the Son of David, in strains as warm and elevated as those of the loftiest seraphim. Having thus cleared the subject from the misapprehensions of ignorance, I would now,

II. Defend it against the objections which the abettors of a gloomy system have urged against it. These objectors I shall class under the division of

1. Those who limit the salvation of infants to certain conditional circumstances; and

2. Those who refer it entirely to divine Sovereignty, and who affect to believe, on this account alone, that the great majority of infants perish. I shall take no other notice of the opinion of some divines, that the souls of infants who die are annihilated, than just to mention it

as altogether untenable. It was no part of the original curse, and it would be a punishment where there has been no transgression.

I. There are some who confine the salvation of infants to a certain descent, and others who limit it to the performance of a certain rite. The character of their parents is considered as ensuring happiness to the departed infants of believers by one party; and baptism is represented as imparting this blessing to them on whom it has been performed by the other.

1. Those who would confine salvation to a pious descent, urge, in support of their notion, that many promises are made to the children of believers, and that severe denunciations are uttered against the offspring of the wicked.

Among the privileges promised to the faith of parents our opponents have to show that eternal life is comprehended. If these promises, however, extended so far as to assure the salvation of such infants, they would only prove, what we most readily admit, that there are, besides the general arguments in favour of the salvation of ALL children, some other additional ones in favour of those of believers.

But these reasoners turn round upon us here, and tell us that it was a distinguishing character of the God of Israel, that he visited the iniquity of the fathers upon the children even unto the

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third and fourth generation. It is obvious, however, that this was intended of those only who walked in the ways of their fathers ; and instead of a proof of Divine severity, it is an evidence of Divine clemency. When, therefore, the Jews abused this maxim to a reflection on the moral character of the Deity, and said, the “ fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge ;” the Lord reproves the injurious reflection. “ No,” says Jehovah, “ it shall no more be thus said, Behold all souls are mine ; as the soul of the father so also the soul of the son is mine ; the soul that sinneth, it shall die—the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father—every one shall die for his own iniquity—every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.”

But in the very front of this passage, the objectors declare, that the Almighty has acted upon the former principle. The cases of the antediluvian world—the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—of Korah Dathan, and Abiram—of the Canaanites and of the rebellious Jews, are triumphantly quoted ; but what are we to infer from all these instances ? The same thing happens alike to all. Who will be hardy enough to maintain, that all the infants that have died by public calamity have perished ?

This argument, in another view, refutes itself ; it proves too much ; it takes for granted, that all the holy persons who have fallen in such cala-

mities are lost ; I deny the conclusion, and the reasonings which are adduced to support it.

The children of pagans or profane persons are no further gone from original righteousness than those of the most religious parents ; besides, this supposition makes children suffer, not only for the crime of their first, but also of their immediate parents.

2. As to those who limit salvation to baptism, the notion is too absurd to be countenanced for a moment ; those who entertain it, do not deserve “ to hear themselves convinced.”

II. The second class of objectors argue from the divine Sovereignty, and what they imagine to be corroborating texts of Scripture, that multitudes of infants are lost. We reply, that sovereignty is inapplicable here. By this the grace of God would not be glorified ; in other cases of selection it may be ; but infants do not present a variety of character ; in original guilt they are exactly on a level. To support themselves in this horrid notion, our opponents say, that the Scriptures include numbers of infants among the lost. This I positively deny.

1. What St. Peter says of the former world has no relation to infants ; for the persons he speaks of as lost, were preached to by the Spirit

of Christ in Noah's ministry, and were also disobedient to that preaching.

2. The infants of Sodom and Gomorrah—

But those whom Jude declares are under the vengeance of eternal fire, are only those who **GAVE THEMSELVES OVER TO FORNICATION**, and went after strange flesh, which cannot be applied to infants.

In further confirmation of their cruel hypothesis, these reasoners urge the following texts:—

Romans ix. 11, 13—"For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Now, it is supposed, if Esau had died in infancy he must have eternally perished; and, therefore, other reprobates, as Esau is supposed to be, may die in infancy, and perish for ever. But it may as well be supposed, that if Jacob had died before his conversion, he must have been lost also; with equal reason, might it be inferred, that other elect persons may die before conversion, and perish likewise. We have no right to place suppositions against facts. Esau did not die in infancy, nor any other reprobate person that we know of.

The next passage is Romans v. 14—"Death

reigned from Adam to Moses, even over *them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression.*" This is supposed to be decisive. The persons here intended, are agreed to be infants; and the death here referred to, in order to prove the destruction of infants, is assumed to be eternal death. Admitting this, however, it does not follow that infants actually perished; but only that they came under the sentence of condemnation, which is not disputed; for the apostle adds, "That if death reigned by one (Adam), much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ." The reign of death, in whatever sense it be understood, does not exclude the reign of grace. Death reigned universally; but are all therefore lost? God forbid. "Where sin abounded unto death, even there hath grace superabounded unto eternal life."

The next objection is, that "few will be saved."

Examine every one of the texts relating to this, and you will find that they do not relate to the aggregate body of the saved, but to the comparative numbers at certain given periods. But let me now briefly, in the

IIIrd Place, furnish every benevolent Christian with a few direct arguments in favour of that

hypothesis which he must anxiously desire to be true.

1. The first argument I derive from the Divine perfections—both the goodness and the justice of God.

There is a manifest difference between original and actual guilt; a difference analogous to that between personal and imputed righteousness: consequently, we become guilty through our connexion with Adam, in the same manner as we are made righteous through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. As, therefore, we cannot properly be said to *merit* eternal life by his obedience, so neither can we before actual sin, be said, in a strict sense, to *deserve* eternal death, any otherwise than through our relation to our first progenitor. It is on this account, I suppose, that the Prophet calls infants—as he is commonly, and I think justly, understood—“innocents;” and with an epithet of tenderness and pity for their sufferings, “poor innocents.”—Jeremiah ii. 34; xix. 4 compare ver. 5. “Will the Lord destroy the innocent with the wicked? that be far from thee—shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

2. Argument from the discourses and conduct of Jesus Christ.

3. Argument from the nature of the final

18:3
10:14
18:16

judgment; and the character of future punishments.

1. Condemnation proceeds in virtue of actual conduct; deeds done and written in the book-workers of iniquity.

2. The torments of a future state, according to the Scripture account of them, do not seem such as infants are capable of suffering—remorse, &c.

In this subject,

1. Bereaved parents possess consolation.

2. Here is a full justification of Providence in the vast devastation among the infants of our race. Why are they thus taken away? to save them from the evil to come—to replenish the heavenly world—to constitute an infinite majority on the Saviour's side.

3. Here we have a striking proof of our sinful state by nature.

4. Here we behold, most illustriously displayed, the boundless nature of Divine grace.

5. Here we are reminded of the danger to which all unconverted persons are exposed, when come to an age in which they are accountable.

6. Hence we may infer the duty and propriety of bringing children to Christ.

COLLOSSIANS III. 1, 2.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.

THE fact of Christ's resurrection is so familiar to us, that it loses the impression it should make; but had we seen the darkness which enveloped Calvary at his crucifixion—had we seen the still heavier gloom which enveloped the minds of his disciples—"We thought that it had been He that should have redeemed Israel"—then might we have felt the joy diffused by the intelligence—"The Lord is risen indeed." The interest which this fact had on the affections of the apostles, and the importance of it to their faith, will sufficiently account for the frequency with which they state it, the allusions which they constantly make to it, and the illustration of Christian doctrine which they derive from it.

I. The premises which the Apostle assumes.

II. The duty which, from these premises, he inculcates.

I. The premises assumed.

1. Christ is risen. This was a miraculous display of Omnipotent agency; it was a fulfilment of ancient prophecy. The mission of Christ was introduced and attested by a splendid apparatus of prophecy and miracles. The predictions were not written after the event: this objection takes the event for granted, and affords a testimony when it would insinuate a charge. The events actually happened. This fact is well attested—the witnesses saw it, and they were many—they could not be mistaken—they had no interest to deceive—they attested it at their peril—they sealed their testimony with their blood.

“It is a very singular circumstance in this testimony,” says Bishop Horsley, “that it is such as no length of time can diminish. It is founded upon the universal principles of human nature, upon maxims which are the same in all ages, and operate with equal strength in all mankind, under all the varieties of temper and habit of constitution. So long as it shall be contrary to the first principles of the human mind to delight in falsehood for its own sake; so long as it

shall be true that no man willingly propagates a lie to his own detriment and to no purpose; so long it will be certain that the apostles were serious and sincere in the assertion of our Lord's resurrection. So long as it shall be absurd to suppose, that twelve men could all be deceived in the person of a friend with whom they had all lived three years; so long it will be certain that the apostles were competent to judge of the truth and reality of the fact which they asserted. So long as it shall be in the nature of man, for his own interest and ease, to be dearer than that of another to himself; so long it will be an absurdity to suppose, that twelve men would persevere for years in the joint attestation of a lie, to the great detriment of every individual of the conspiracy, and without any joint or separate advantage, when any of them had it in his power, by a discovery of the fraud, to advance his own fame and fortune by the sacrifice of nothing more dear to him than the reputation of the rest; and so long will it be incredible, that the story of our Lord's resurrection was a fiction, which the twelve men (to mention no greater number) with unparalleled fortitude and equal folly conspired to support; so long, therefore, as the Evangelical History shall be preserved entire—that is, so long as the historical books of the New Testament shall be extant in the world; so long the credibility of the apostles' testimony will remain whole and unimpaired."

As this circumstance, to have in itself the principle of permanency, never happened to human testimony in any other instance, this preservation of the form and integrity of the apostolic evidence, amidst all the storms and wrecks which human science, like all things human, hath in the course of ages undergone, is like the preservation of the Jewish nation, something of a standing miracle. It shows, in the original propagation of the gospel, that contrivance and forecast in the plan, that power in the execution, which are far beyond the natural abilities of the human mind, and declares that the whole work and counsel was of God.

2. The next fact which the text assumes, is the spiritual resurrection of all his followers—I say spiritual, for they are not buried literally, nor do they literally rise.

Though the one will be true ere long, and the other will take place on that bright morning, when all the saints shall awake to everlasting light and blessedness.

This implies our penal, moral, and spiritual degradation, by nature: we are dead in sins, and buried in the cares, follies, and pursuits of the world. By the power of the spirit operating, by the facts and truths of Christianity, we arise. “Old things pass away, and all things become new.”

(1). As sinners, we are under the sentence of death ; but being risen with Christ, this sentence is reversed—we are justified.

(2). As sinners, we are under the *power* of death.

Our affections dead to divine pleasures—the understanding to sacred truth—the heart to spiritual feelings ;—but when we are risen with Christ, the affections lose their torpor, the mind its languor :—’tis like as Chaos lay in sullen silent darkness till the spirit moved—the waves sparkled into flame, and from the stagnant deep awoke the glory that illumined the creation.

3. Another of the premises which the text assumes, is the influence of the resurrection of Christ, in effecting this spiritual resurrection of his followers.

(1). It turns the sentence of death into the benediction of heaven and the promise of glory—it awakens the hope of immortality.

The Apostle speaks, in another of his epistles, of the “ power of the resurrection.” Do I exercise living faith in this all-important fact ? Then I enter into the design of the Saviour’s rising, and am quickened together with him. He rose to justify me ; I receive with gratitude the precious boon. He rose to convey to my soul all the

fruits of his spirit, the tokens of his love, newness of life, and complete salvation. I am a joyful partaker of them all.

He rose to proclaim his conquest over death, and to embalm the grave to all his followers. Death hath no more dominion over me, and my flesh shall rest in hope. "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

II. The duty which from these premises the apostle inculcates—

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above; set your affections on things above."

The resurrection of Christ was only to precede and to be preparatory to his ascension into heaven. Prior to his death, and till that awful part of his mediatorial undertaking was accomplished, earth was the scene of his labour, and the redemption that he was here to finish occupied his every thought. Heaven was only the distant joy that was set before him, and which cheered him with a comparatively feeble glory when he was passing through the dark horrors of more than mortal anguish; but when he rose, he had no more to do on earth—every word, every action, was a preparation for the skies. The dull particles of mortality which hung around his body, were gradually melting away as he conversed with his apostles; and at length a cloud received him, and he vanished out of

their sight. For a time they gazed on vacancy ; they endeavoured to trace his progress through the yielding air ; but the heavens received him. And henceforth heaven becomes the supreme object of their love—they long to depart—they are wearied with the world. They stay but as angels, who are executing a commission of mercy.

Thus *our* resurrection to spiritual life, is to prepare for our removal to heaven ; it has arrayed heaven in new glories—it has constituted it the place of our rest and joy.

“ Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God ;” these things are attainable—they are indispensable—they are invaluable.

1. Seek knowledge as unbounded as the creation—treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

2. Purity unsullied as the light of heaven—alas ! too pure for us ; but the more the heart is sanctified, the more desirable will this appear.

3. Love elevated to God, and expanded to all his creatures.

To the church of the first-born.

The innumerable company of angels. Spirits of just men made perfect. Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. God, the judge of all.

“ Set your affections on things above.” If ye be

risen with Christ; and if Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God, be precious to you, this will necessarily follow.

The resurrection and ascension of our Saviour operate as a rational motive and a moral emblem.

1. The ascension of Christ, by adding further encouragement to our hope, becomes a rational motive to us to refine and elevate our affections, and to have our conversation in that heaven, of our interest in which the ascension of Christ in our nature is so convincing an assurance.

2. As a moral emblem.

Many parts of our Redeemer's life and history, which are not exactly imitable by us, yet point out to us some resembling excellence, and may be imitated, though not literally, yet in figure. Of this kind are his resurrection and ascension. We cannot, in these instances, follow him now, as he once said to Peter; but may we not ascend with him by an elevation of our thoughts and affections? The local and bodily ascension of Christ calls for a moral and spiritual ascent.

In this respect, the pious and seraphic soul may bear up herself upon the wings of contemplation, love, and desire, and follow her ascending Lord where the eyes of the wondering

apostles were forced to leave him, and say, in the words of Elisha to his departing master, “ As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.”

Believers are raised with Christ ; but are we so raised ? has the resurrection of Christ its proper and full effect upon our hearts ?

If David were now to arise, his ears would be full of the music of heaven ; if Solomon, his mind would beam with the science of angels and the glory of the skies ; and what think you on earth could engage their attention ? Perhaps they did arise ; many of the saints did awake and go unto Jerusalem. And there let our imagination follow them ; they went into the temple—they saw the sacrifices, but the great sacrifice was offered, and these must have been an abomination in their sight. They heard the sacred songs, but they had heard the harps of angels, and joined the shouts of the redeemed. They saw the building, and might have admired it, as did the apostles a week or two before this event ; but they had seen the heavenly Jerusalem, not built with hands ; they saw the country, and the spring was now just blooming, as it is with us in May ; but they had seen the paradise above.

We follow them to the place of concourse ; they look with pity on busy mortals, toiling for the bread that perisheth, while they neglect the bread of eternal life : they pass the money-

changers, but the streets of their city are paved with gold. What, then, are these shining pebbles? They go through the public exchange, and hear the din of politics, the gossip of the vain and idle, the slander of the malevolent, and the jests of fools. *Hear*, did I say? No; they stop their ears: they had seen what mortal eyes had never seen—they had heard what mortal ears had never heard, and they could not attend to any object beneath the sun.

And why is it not the same with us? We, too, as believers, are risen with Christ; we are elevated to the ranks of heaven—we have been seated in heavenly places; and why is it not so with us? Alas! our faith is weak, and our graces unformed: we see through a glass darkly, and the god of this world hath blinded our eyes.

When our affections are above, how shall we look down on earth?

What will our conversation be? Let us go back to the saints, the attendants of the risen Redeemer—hear their converse. Alas! we cannot. Most of what they uttered bears the seal of eternal silence; but we are well supplied with a sample—Moses and Elias conversing on the mount. On what? on the death of the Saviour. Here then is the subject of heavenly converse; they conversed not on the political affairs of the Romans and the Jews, nor of the schools of eloquence and philosophy—Christ and his cross are

all their theme. To angels in heaven they have ever been subjects of the deepest interest—they were powerfully attracted by his resurrection—they exulted to ascend with him—he is their everlasting song:—

“ They saw his heart transfix’d with wounds,
His crimson sweat and gore ;
They saw him break the bars of death,
Which none e’er brake before.

They brought his chariot from above,
To bear him to his throne ;
Clapt their triumphant wings, and cried,
The glorious work is done.”

LUKE XIII. 6, 7, 8, 9.

He spake also this parable : A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard ; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none : Cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ?

And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it :

And if it bear fruit well, and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

THE great points to which our Saviour summoned the attention of the censorious and uncharitable Jews in this parable were, their peculiar privileges—their infinite criminality in abusing these privileges—their obligations to the forbearance of God, and the compassion of his Son—and the fearful doom in which impenitence and irreligion would at last involve them.

The subject before us is unfruitfulness in religion, and unfruitfulness under peculiar circumstances of aggravation.

The observations by which I would expose to abhorrence this deplorable character of a religious profession, I would derive from the words which I have read.

And does it not appear from hence, that an unfruitful tree in the vineyard of God,

I. Is an object of just surprise.

II. Draws upon itself peculiar scrutiny.

III. Occasions the display of astonishing patience.

IV. Provokes deserved vengeance.

V. Excites anxious and compassionate solicitude.

VI. Experiences at last a tremendous and a fatal doom.

I. An object of just surprise. A profession of religion, connected with great and numerous advantages, ought to be productive of corresponding fruits.

1. They are in the vineyard.

2. Enjoy the means of grace—their understandings, heart, and conscience are frequently addressed.

3. They are surrounded with the best examples.

4. They are in a great measure placed above the influence of the world.

5. They give a pledge of fruitfulness by voluntarily bearing the Christian name.

II. An individual placed in circumstances most favourable to religion, but who continues unfruitful, draws upon himself peculiar scrutiny : he is an object of attention

1. To the world.

2. Christians also scrutinize each other with a holy, benevolent vigilance.

3. The ministers of religion are constantly concerned to observe the fruit of their labours.

4. An object of scrutiny to angels.

5. Jesus the Son of God feels most peculiarly interested.

6. But this unprofitable individual is an object of attention to God himself : the scrutiny is silent, and the Observer is every where with us, yet invisible.

III. But I observe again, that allowing a person to continue from year to year in an unfruitful religious profession, without inflicting deserved punishment, displays on the part of God astonishing patience.

He is a being of almighty power, of unsullied purity ; He is sensible of all the rebellion and ingratitude of his creatures.

He is independent.

Let us not presume ; for do you not observe,

IV. That though patience may long endure, vengeance will not always slumber ? cut it down. This is a debt of justice which the Divine Being owes to his character and the interests of his church.

When I look around on this assembly, I think of the privileges which are enjoyed and abused ; even now, I seem to hear the God of justice addressing many of you in the language of deserved severity — childhood — youth — manhood. But what voice is that I hear, that arrests the arm of vengeance, and calms an incensed God ?

V. That at the very moment Divine patience seems to be exhausted, the unfruitful professor of religion still excites compassionate solicitude.

VI. The fatal doom of those who continue to the end unfruitful.

1. They are removed from the world.

2. From the means of grace.

3. From beneficial afflictions.

4. They are removed in wrath—their doom is deserved, tremendous, and everlasting.

Address the

1. Totally barren.

2. Doubtful.

3. Those who have brought forth fruit.

MATTHEW XIII. 39.

The reapers are the angels.

I. The field : this world, not exclusively but principally—a mysterious connexion between this globe and other parts of the creation.

II. The period : the *end* of the world.

Whatever appertains to the present state, belongs to a temporary economy. It is difficult to

conceive of the termination of that, which, for six thousand years in uninterrupted succession, has continued unchanged and apparently the same; but change deteriorates the character of all creatures; the world doomed to destruction—as the witness and accomplice of sin—as suited only to the probation of moral beings.

III. The produce : the souls of men.

These are distinguished as tares and wheat, but both in the church, making a visible profession of religion; the existence of unholy men, heretics and hypocrites in the visible church—the great work and grand artifice of Satan, to excite prejudice against what he cannot destroy—to have enemies in the camp to betray the citadel, and to produce confusion and every evil work. Men, however are responsible; they are not the simple instruments of the devil's agency; they are consenting agents acting with him—they are his dupes—they suffer their minds to be blinded.

But not only those who visibly profess religion are included in the produce of this great harvest; Pagans—Jews—Turks—Infidels—all mankind—all the generations of mankind—all the different ranks—the aged and the young.

IV. The instruments employed to gather the harvest : “ The reapers are the angels.”

1. A superior order of beings.

2. The ready servants of God.

3. Eminently qualified for the task—

(1). From their knowledge.

(2). From their equity, impartiality, and justice.

(3). From their previous employment. Ministering spirits, &c.

4. From the interest which they especially take in the redemption of Christ.

They reap—they gather in the harvest; not a grain will be lost; not a weed, not a tare will escape. Under which of these classes do we range?

The prospect of this harvest should deeply interest us, for it involves our destiny.

What an awful part of the Divine economy is the ministry of angels. Let us not presume, because we are spared and permitted to make a profession of religion, that we are Christians indeed.

Let us refer the explanation of all mysteries to the consummation of all things.

HEBREWS XII. 2.

*Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of
our faith.*

I. THE object which the text proposes.

II. The duty which it recommends.

III. The relation of both to the character, conflicts, and glorious termination of the Christian life.

I. The object which the text proposes—Jesus.

The Scriptures represent him under a variety of aspects, all of them important and deserving of our attention.

1. Of personal grandeur and meanness.

2. Of circumstantial glory and ignominy.

3. Of suffering and felicity.

They exhibit him as sustaining important and peculiar characters.

1. First in the principles of his mind, and in

the actions and sufferings of his life and death, sustaining the character of an example.

2. They display these same actions, sufferings, and death, as vicarious and mediatorial.

Another aspect is that under which he appears as invested with high and majestic prerogatives.

1. The possession of a mediatorial throne.

2. The keys of death and of hell.

3. The bestower of eternal life.

4. The source and sum of immortal felicity—the *heaven of heaven*.

II. The duty which, in reference to this object, the text recommends.

It is to regard Jesus, according to the respective aspects under which he is exhibited,

1. As the most singular, amiable, and glorious Being in the universe; and, therefore, worthy to attract our admiration, homage, and love.

2. It is to regard him, under all the vicissitudes of his condition, with corresponding emotions of heart.

3. As every way adapted to our state as guilty, lost, and ruined sinners.

4. As the life, consolation, and the happiness of the soul in every condition.

The performance of this duty,

1. Implies a supernatural faculty.

2. A suitable medium through which it is exercised.

3. Unwearied and uninterrupted perseverance.

It is the duty of every moment; it is the spring and soul of every other duty. Having thus considered the object and the duty, let us

III. View them both in relation to the character, conflicts, and glorious termination of the Christian life.

Faith is often used in a precise, in a general, and in a comprehensive sense.

1. Sometimes it embraces the whole of Christianity as a system. The knowledge of Christianity is essential to the existence of Christian principles; and how can this knowledge be better attained, than by looking to Jesus, its glorious author and source? Knowledge of the gospel, is knowledge of Christ.

2. The term Faith, more frequently signifies the principle of the Christian life, which believes on the Saviour, and relies on him alone for salvation: of this, too, Jesus is the author; and as he is its natural and necessary object, the more directly and constantly it is exercised upon him, the stronger it becomes; the more vivid in its realizing power, the brighter is our evidence of its existence, and of our personal interest in its glorious object.

3. But faith sometimes comprehends the whole course of the Christian life. Of this life Christ is the author. By him it is imparted, maintained, and perfected in glory. Looking to him

1. Is its first act, and constant evidence.

2. Thus, too, it is gradually increased and matured. "Beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."

3. It is thus, too, that the Divine life will be perfected; to finish, is not only to terminate, but to perfect. And looking to Jesus, not through the present obscuring medium adapted to a state of probation and trial, not through a glass darkly, but in open vision face to face, will be

the perfection of this life in heaven. "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." So true is the apostolic declaration, that "Christ is all in all."

We begin our religion by opening our eyes upon him; we pursue it by making him our polar star; we finish our course in the act of looking for him, as the blessed hope of immortality; and all the felicity of heaven consists in being with him, where he is, and beholding his glory.

ISAIAH LXIII. 1, 2, 3, 4.

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat?

I have trodden the wine-press alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.

For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.

HEROES and battles, defeats and victories, garments rolled in blood, and all the pomp and circumstance of dreadful war, unhappily, are things with which we are too familiar. From our earliest infancy we have heard, we have read, we have talked, of little else; one conqueror after another has demanded our homage, and the imagination has dwelt with astonishment

on martial prowess and deeds of valiant enterprise. But “who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?” of whom we seldom read in the page of history, whose exploits are unknown in the annals of earthly fame, and whom the Nimrods, the Pharaohs, the Nebuchadnezzers of the earth affect to despise; for whom there is no niche in their temple of worldly glory. It is one who is mightier than they; whose name will live when theirs are forgotten; whose deeds will be told in the anthems of eternity, and the incense of whose praise will fill the temple of the universe. He shines even now in the glory of conquest, and he is on his march to seize new trophies of victory; he is going on conquering and to conquer; the day of vengeance is in his heart; the year of his redeemed is approaching, and all enemies shall be trampled under his feet. You have already, my brethren, anticipated to whom I refer; his name is on every tongue—“it is Jesus,” the captain of salvation. Isaiah beheld him in prophetic vision as a mighty warrior; and in the answers to the questions which the prophet presumed to ask, he revealed himself as a saviour and an avenger; the work of salvation he represents himself to have accomplished, and now the day of vengeance is in his heart; we shall, therefore, consider the text as exhibiting him to our view as

a deliverer and a destroyer : as a deliverer, he appears mighty to save ; as a destroyer, he treads down the people in his anger, and brings down their strength to the earth.

I. In the first place, Jesus Christ presents himself to us as a saviour—a deliverer. “ He comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah ;” he is glorious in his apparel, and he travels in the greatness of his strength.

Imagine to yourselves that you see him rising from the dead with the wounds in his hands, his temples, and his feet—in the greatness of his strength, he rolls away the stone—with dignity of mien and stately grace, he leaves the tomb. Here you have the prophetic vision realized—“ He comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah.” He has been engaged with enemies ; who and what were they ? The conflict has been sharp and severe ; what did he endure ? the victory is in his favour, and it is complete ; for lo, he travels in the greatness of his strength : he comes from Edom and Bozrah, this was the scene of his glory.

But in this conflict, whose cause did he espouse, and for whom was the victory gained ?

1. The enemies with whom our Redeemer contended, were not the armies of earth ; they were all the powers of darkness, with their direful auxiliaries—sin and death. They were the

enemies which have carried all other conquerors captive.

2. In grapling with these adversaries, the conflict was severe; for this warrior stood alone, and he overcame by suffering, grief, and pain. To conquer sin, it was necessary he should become a man—to conquer death, it was requisite that he should enter his dark dominions—to overcome Satan with signal glory, it was important that he should subdue him by weakness. On all these accounts he was exposed to the more imminent danger.

3. But observe the victory is in his favour, and it is complete. The scene of his glory was Edom, and the heart of it Bozrah. He did not only attack the outskirts, but he sought the strongest fortress; he entered the central city; he went forward with toil and difficulty and peril, but he returns gloriously with the scars of honour, and with the calm stateliness of victory.

Edom and Bozrah were the habitation of God's enemies; they hated the Israelites; figuratively, they represent the field of Christ's sufferings.

4. But whose cause did he espouse, and for whom was the victory gained?

It was the cause of benevolence and of humanity—it was to save the ruined—to give strength to the helpless—to rescue the captive.

The creature whose cause he espoused, was most unworthy. Here we see his mercy.

It was most miserable. Here observe his compassion.

It could be saved only by means of the sufferings and death of the deliverer. Here mark the greatness of his love.

As a saviour the Lord Jesus appears infinitely amiable and glorious. What a subject of exultation and joy to us, that he was crowned with victory! He died and he rose again. Had he failed, how deplorable would our condition have been!

The church, and every individual Christian, in weakness, and under temptation and persecution, may take courage. Our deliverer appeared for us on Calvary in our utmost need, and he is ever ready to espouse our cause.

By the eye of faith, we may always behold him standing at the right hand of God.

But our text exhibits Jesus to our view as a conqueror under another character besides that of a saviour—as an avenger and destroyer; and under this

II. Character we would now secondly consider him.

What he did on Calvary was not so much in

vengeance to his enemies, as in love to his redeemed. He fixed his heart on the salvation of his people—their interest he identified with his own—their danger and misery filled him with compassion, and inspired him with zeal; and it was for them he fought,—for their salvation he bled and died. Having accomplished this, vengeance to his adversaries became his next consideration; and this he is executing in the dispensations of his providence; he is every hour bruising Satan's head, and alarming his fears, confounding the subtilty of the politician, and making the diviners mad. The persecuting bigot, and the gainsaying infidel, and the smooth-tongued hypocrite, often feel marks of his displeasure. But the text carries us forward to that day for which all other days were made. Vengeance is in his heart; salvation is for ever accomplished; he has now nothing to do but to destroy.

I hear his majestic voice—

“Those mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring them forth and slay them before me.” Nay, he rises himself to trample them in his fury.

1. The infernal oppressors of the church, and the daring adversaries of God, are bound in everlasting chains. On this day Jesus not only conquers: this he did signally on the cross, and this he has done a thousand times since the fall.

But now he triumphs; he leads captivity captive; he subdues the great dragon, and exposes him as vanquished before an astonished universe. Now, Lucifer, son of the morning, thy direful forebodings are more than realized—thy fears, which armed thee with fury and enmity, deepen into the horrors of sullen and unmitigable despair? Now, the glorious Saviour triumphs over all his human adversaries—the politician that planned the destruction of his church—the mighty ones of the earth that usurped authority, where he alone was king—the tyrants and the persecutors that dipped their vestures in Christian blood—the bigot that slew his brother, and made a religion of love sanction the accursed deed—the infidel, that tauntingly said, where is the promise of his coming—and the hypocrite that wrapped himself in the veil of an angel—all shall feel the vengeance of the insulted God. Swift destruction shall be the portion of their cup; they cannot hide themselves, for the abyss of darkness itself is, to the avenger, luminous as the sun.

They cannot escape, for he fills immensity with his presence—they cannot resist, for he is almighty.

They dare not arraign his proceedings, for he is the “holy, holy, holy Lord God.”

Under what character shall we, my brethren, meet this glorious Personage at the last day, that day of vengeance?

Will he stain his raiment with our blood? and will there be no eye to pity, no arm to save?

shall we be consumed by the lightning of his eyes; or will he smile upon us, while we take our station with the armies in white, and assume the badge of his friends?

The thought that Christ will punish all his enemies, should teach us to bear with patience the insults and blasphemies and rebellion of wicked men—to strive for their conversion, and to do them all the kind offices in our power. Let us take care that we are not among the number of his enemies. The great day of his wrath will come. May we be able to stand!

LUKE VIII. 38, 39.

Now the man out of whom the devils were departed, besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying,

Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.

THIS interesting and affecting narrative, while it displays the miraculous power of the Son of God, and his absolute dominion over the spiritual

world, may be rendered peculiarly instructive to us, if we view it as emblematical of a sinner,

- I. Previous to his conversion ;
- II. At his conversion, and
- III. Subsequent to his conversion.

I. *Previous* to his conversion.

Here we notice between the demoniac and the sinner, six points of resemblance :

1. He is possessed by an unclean spirit ;
2. He lives among the dead,
3. Is disordered in his intellects,
4. Is his own tormentor,
5. Is in a state of utter destitution and wretchedness,
6. Is beyond the power of human assistance or restraint.

But we observe,

II. A resemblance between the cure of this man and the *conversion* of a sinner ; and we may notice three points of similarity :

1. The means employed : the word of Christ.
2. The influence exerted : the Almighty power of Christ.
3. The effect produced.

The unclean spirit expelled : he is clothed—he is at the feet of Christ, and in his right mind.

III. The state of the demoniac after his cure, presents us with some resemblance of a sinner *after his conversion*.

1. He desired to remain with Christ.

This was natural ; he was impelled to this by a sense of danger, of gratitude, of obligation. Conversion, is conversion to the love of Christ and the obedience of Christ.

2. Christ commanded him, and he obeyed. He published Christ as an Almighty Saviour, and dwelt on his own cure as the most satisfactory evidence of the truth he proclaimed. His change and subsequent life and spirit exhibited Christ and the glory of his salvation.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. We have seen, in this subject, every possible state in which the mind can be, in reference to religion.

2. Under the influence of an evil spirit, are you rejecting Christ—do you view him as your tormentor? or, tired, disgusted with the slavery of Satan, are you anxious for liberty? Do you feel that your case is desperate?

3. Have you experienced his great salvation?
“Go and do likewise.”

JEREMIAH XXIX. 11.

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,
saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of
evil, to give you an expected end.*

From this text observe,

- I. That God thinks of his people;
- II. That he is conscious of his thoughts;
- III. His thoughts are kind in their nature;
- IV. They are glorious in their end;
- V. Their end may be anticipated;

I. God thinks of his people—in their *distance* from Him, in their *guilt* and *danger*, in their numerous and diversified *trials*.

In *life* and in *death*. He thinks of *all* his people.

II. He is conscious of his thoughts.

An infinitely perfect being has no succession of thoughts. Present to his mind are all the truths, purposes, principles, results, within the compass of the possible. Intelligent creatures think but from the limited nature of their faculties; they can dwell only on one subject at a time. But, whatever thoughts were once in the Divine mind, on whatever subject, are *always* present to his consciousness. In the text, however, he descends to the narrowness of our conceptions, and speaks of “his thoughts” as we are accustomed to do of our own, when we intend to invest them with peculiar emphasis. Thus we are taught to consider them,

1. As thoughts which he eternally revolves;

2. To which he attaches paramount and infinite importance;

3. Which no circumstances can induce him to change, to banish, or to forget.

III. These thoughts are kind in their nature; they are thoughts of peace, and not of evil.

1. To make peace with sinful, guilty men, requires the understanding and thought of the Infinite mind.

2. The peace that is revealed, both in the method of its accomplishment and the manner of its bestowment, displays Divine intelligence.

3. But these thoughts of peace are infinitely kind; God might have meditated nothing but evil—nothing but interminable war.

4. The value of the kindness of these thoughts may be estimated by the nature of the blessings which they mean to convey; peace, in opposition to war—repose, in opposition to trembling anxiety—solid comfort, in opposition to heartless and transient joy; peace, as the fruit of every affliction—as the end of every mysterious and perplexing dispensation—as the blessed consequence of the pains of death.

IV. The end of these thoughts is glorious—to give you an expected end.

Fear and dread forebode, and they point only to despair; hope anticipates, brightens, and glorifies its objects.

The end which God has in view, in all his dispensations towards his people, is

1. Glory to Himself.

2. Security and blessedness to them.

3. How great this is, no created mind can describe or even conceive.

V. This end may always be anticipated,

1. If we are familiar with the principles of his government ;

2. The promises of his word.

3. The experience of his people.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. This subject should be viewed in reference to our fears and hopes, our sorrows and joys.

2. It calls upon us to admire and adore the Divine condescension and love ;

3. To place unbounded confidence in the resources of the infinite Spirit ;

4. To live in constant anticipation.

5. It teaches us the necessity of belonging to the family of heaven.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON I. 4.

Draw me, we will run after Thee.

THE idea of the text is attraction. It expresses the ardent desire of a spiritual mind after God—the supreme object of all worship, and the sum of all happiness.

The natural bias of the heart is opposed to God, and to its own felicity.

The energy of Divine power is necessary to change this bias; but this energy must be suited to an accountable nature.

1. Let us notice the object of this attraction.
Draw me,

1. From fallacious hopes and confidences.

2. From unsatisfactory pursuits.

3. From myself.

4. From the world.

Draw me,

1. To thy throne of grace.

2. To thy church.

3. To thy table.

4. To thy heart.

5. To thy heaven.

But let us consider,

II. The nature of this attraction.

Draw me,

1. By the means which thou hast appointed.

2. By the spiritual and infinitely glorious manifestations of thy love.

3. By the secret energy of thy power.

III. The effect of this attraction, "*We will run after Thee.*"

This intimates

1. Vigour.

2. Alacrity.

3. Rapidity.

4. Approximation.

IMPROVEMENT.

Observe here,

1. The connexion between Divine and human agency.

2. Between an enlightened mind and acceptable prayer.

3. Between Divine operation and its certain success.

Let this be our prayer.

Let it be constantly our prayer.

And especially at this season of communion.

EPHESIANS II. 7

That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

THE letters of the Apostles to the churches, contain the most interesting and important revelations of Divine mercy. They possess all the charm of truth, glowing with the ardour of sanctified and holy affection; they not only exhibit Christian doctrine, but Christian doctrine

as it is vital and influential in the heart; they are epistles of Christ, conveyed through the medium of human feeling and sentiment; they enlighten and purify all the springs of action; we behold them as the great elements of character: thus they powerfully excite our sympathy, and become motives to stimulate our progress in the way to heaven. The writings of St. Paul are eminently distinguished by this peculiarity: he speaks as one who has tasted and handled and felt the truths which he undertakes to recommend and enforce. Nothing is didactic; but all is personal, experimental, and impressive. When especially his theme is the love of God, the condescension of the Saviour, the grace of the Spirit, his thoughts breathe, his words burn, his whole soul glows with celestial ardour; and he is all devotion, zeal, gratitude, and joy. In this epistle, and more particularly in this chapter, he rises above himself; his views have all the comprehensiveness of inspiration—his language all the redundancy of passion; already he feels himself in heaven. Thither, also, he conveys all who are quickened with Christ, who have passed from death unto life; he pursues the stream of mercy to its fountain, rises with it to the throne of God and the Lamb, identifies grace and glory, stretches his imagination into the ages of eternity, and contemplates the redeemed as the bright manifestations of the exceeding riches of Divine loving-kindness to the wondrous universe. Sus-

tained by the Spirit which thus animated him, let us, from the elevation where he has placed us, view the subjects which he proposes for our consideration.

I. We observe, that the kindness of God comprehends exceeding riches of grace.

The perfections of God are his riches ; all these he has made subservient to his grace. God is love, and his love has assumed every form of condescension ; it is kindness, loving-kindness, tender mercy.

The eternity of his being, that exclusive attribute of his nature, is devoted to the purposes of his love ; it is endless duration, on which he has suspended the hopes and joys of myriads of his creatures : his immutability is the unchangeableness of his mercy in its purposes, its objects, and its promises : his omnipresence is the ubiquity of love : his power is its omnipotence ; it is either latent or active energy, reserved or employed to advance the cause of goodness : his wisdom is the harmonious arrangement of the universe, to produce the greatest sum of happiness : his justice, holiness, and veracity, all minister to the same end, and prove that God is love.

In the redemption of Christ, these exceeding riches of grace are embodied ; and consecrated to the everlasting welfare of the guilty and miserable children of men. All the perfections of the

Divine nature are here deposited as the riches of the church, the exceeding riches of grace; here they are illustrated in all their glory, the glory of his grace; here they descend in showers of mercy, under every form of blessing which our guilt, weakness, depravity, and sorrow, may render necessary; every blessing is superabundant. The storehouse, in which they are laid up, can never be exhausted. For instance, are they pardons for criminals, that need and seek them? they are infinite in number and extent—and so of the rest.

II. These exceeding riches of grace are treasured up in Christ, and are all communicated through him.

They bear a relation to his *person*, his *offices*, his *sufferings*; *death*, *resurrection*, and *exaltation*: they are his by *right*, by *purchase*, by *merit*. He has procured both Deity and eternity as the sum and glory of our salvation; and he bestows the infinite riches of both upon those who believe in him, and for whom he died.

III. These exceeding riches of grace are bestowed partly in this world; but they are reserved chiefly for the world of glory. The Apostle has, in this chapter, discoursed to us of both; and taught us to discriminate between the riches of the great mercy of God, as it is grace on earth, and glory in heaven.—(Here enter into

the detail with a short exposition of the former verses, till they are brought down to the text.)

IV. That the economy which provides and confers these exceeding riches of grace, bears a relation to other economies, and to the happiness of other orders of beings, in the distant and future ages of eternity. That, in the ages to come, he might *show*, &c. The manifestation of God, of his perfection and glory, is the source of happiness to all intelligent, holy beings. The greatest manifestation of Divine love communicates the greatest portion of felicity to creatures. Thus God has mysteriously connected the salvation of man with the principles of his moral government in other regions. It is to go from world to world, and from one order of creatures to another, till he has shown to the whole universe, in ages to come, the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us. Col. i. 20.

IMPROVEMENT.

What a value does this subject impress upon the Gospel!

What encouragement does it afford to the undeserving and the lost?

How much does it imply in reference to those who are interested in it? That they are quickened, raised, &c. &c.

Under what obligations does it place us?

How delightful and animating the prospects which it unfolds !

2 PETER I. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the Divine nature.

How divine and glorious, and how worthy of all acceptance is that system, which has for its object the advancement of human nature to the highest state of perfection and glory. Such a system is the Gospel ; and that is one of the most beautiful ideas that can be formed of it, which represents it as imparting to a Christian a likeness of God. The Apostle Paul expresses himself on this subject in a manner truly sublime. He assures us, that beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord ; we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord. Similar to this are the words of my text: We become “ partakers of the Divine nature ;” that is, we all become as mirrors. A mirror placed opposite to a luminous object, reflects its rays, and returns its image. How agreeable is this to the

scheme of the Gospel ! Believers, when copying the Divine attributes, and conformed to his perfections, are placed opposite to the Supreme Being, reflecting his rays, and returning his image—exhibiting in themselves the object of their contemplation.

Such, my brethren, is the glory and sublimity of the Gospel ; but not more glorious is the end to which the Gospel advances its genuine believers, than the means by which it accomplishes that end ; for it is by exceeding great and precious promises which are given unto us, that we are made partakers of the Divine nature. Hence, in discoursing from these words, it will be necessary

I. To inquire into the nature of these promises. Without an absolute promise from Jehovah, man, as a fallen creature, could expect neither present good nor future happiness. Conscious of this, our first parents, after eating the forbidden fruit, rushed into a retired part of the garden—vain refuge to hide themselves from God ! and here the guilty pair had sunk into eternal perdition, had not mercy unsought, unimplored, been manifested to the pale and trembling delinquents. Their hearts, already callous with sin, were prone rather to extenuate than to confess their guilt ; they sued not for mercy, because they doubtless concluded there was no mercy for them. It was at this juncture, that the first

promise was made; that the foundation was laid on which such multitudes were afterwards placed; and this promise was to Adam, what all the other promises of the covenant are to us—a defence against God's threatenings. We may observe, in general, that every promise has respect to some present or future good, which becomes the only foundation of our hope; on our part utterly undeserved, and to which we can lay no claim by merit. Under this head, I can only set before you the great cardinal promises, which comprehend all the rest.

1. Pardon of sin is one branch of the promises contained in the covenant. To heathens this inestimable blessing is utterly unknown, and even to the Jews it was but partially revealed. If men sinned wilfully, the law appointed no sacrifices for such sins; but, behold, the Gospel brings you glad tidings of great joy! "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through Christ is preached unto you the forgiveness of sin." "In him we have redemption; through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." "I, even I, am he," saith Jehovah, "that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." Neither the number, nor the aggravations of sin, can exceed the limits of his grace, nor lessen the efficacy of his atonement; for he forgiveth *all* our iniquities; "none of the

sins which he hath committed," saith God, "shall be mentioned unto thim." "Though your sins be red," &c. &c.

With these are intimately connected all those great and precious promises which relate to our justification before God, and our reconciliation with him.

2. A second general promise, is God's grace and Holy Spirit to sanctify our hearts and to assist our obedience.

This proposition is universally true: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." And as true is it, that our heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask it; to enlighten our mind—to rectify our will—to sanctify our nature—to regulate our affections—to support in time of trouble—to assist in time of weakness—to strengthen in time of difficulty.

How necessary such a promise, and how advantageous its accomplishment! Observe the number, the power, the violence of your enemies; consider the snares, the opposition that lie in your way; contemplate your own weakness, then reflect upon the promise of the Spirit. Under this particular, did time permit, we could enumerate all those precious promises which include consolation, direction, instruction, assistance in prayer, in temptation; of knowledge, of grace to mortify sin, of victory over

the world, over Satan, over self; of the increase of grace, strength, courage, and resolution. You cannot read any part of the New Testament without some precious promise arresting your attention, and offering you the comfort which it contains.

3. Another general promise is perseverance to the end of life. Hear the language of an inspired apostle: "Neither death nor life," &c. Hear the voice of him who is not a man, that he should lie, saying, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Glorious security! since Jesus himself hath thus spoken, I will fear no evil, "being confident of this very thing," &c.

4. The last general promise which I shall mention, is the promise of eternal glory.

"Hear it with rapture, O believer!" this is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life. Great part of the promises under the law had respect to temporal blessings; hence it is, that the covenant of the Gospel is said to be established on better promises. The promise of a thousand Canaans would not satisfy a soul panting after God; crying after the living God. No, nothing but beholding his face in righteousness; nothing but to awake up in his

likeness; and all this is promised, for “the righteous shall go away into everlasting life,—so shall they be ever with the Lord.” These, my brethren, are the general promises of the Gospel. To attempt to enumerate them all, is like a man endeavouring on a fine night to count the stars in the heavens; for they are not more profusely scattered over the firmament of heaven, than the promises are over the firmament of Revelation. All I can do, then, is to point to this and that important passage; for as one star differeth from another star in glory, so one promise differs from another promise in importance.

II. But let me consider secondly, the distinguishing appellations which are here given to the promises.

1. Exceeding great.

1. In their nature, what can be so illustrious as the blessings contained and promised in the covenant of grace? Whatever is accounted of great worth among men is here presented. Is peace of mind highly valued? here is peace promised, which is to last for ever; peace with men, with conscience; peace with God; and all this as the pledge of eternal peace in heaven. Is a sincere friend accounted a great privilege? here is a friend promised, compared with whose

affection, that of every other is cold indifference. Is wisdom to be esteemed? here is wisdom which cometh down from above. Is honour a great thing with men? here is promised unfading glory; renown which human and angelic tongues cannot sufficiently celebrate; here is honour which no jealousy can injure, no envy take away, no robber can steal, no time exhaust. Every thing grand, every thing glorious, every thing needful, every thing valuable is contained in these great promises. All the breadths of infinity, all the depths of immensity, all the lengths of eternity.

2. They are exceeding great as to their number.

It would have been a sin to doubt, had there been but one promise given suitable to our condition. But God has most liberally bestowed upon us promises almost without number. Great part of the volume of Revelation is written in the language of promise.

3. Exceeding great as to variety.

Behold this table which the grace of a Saviour hath spread—this supper to which we are invited: what rich variety! Every taste is consulted; every want is anticipated. All the diversities of human guilt, ignorance, wretchedness, age, circumstances, are all regarded; all the faculties of the soul.

2. But they are also exceedingly precious.

1. This arises from their suitableness. The Prodigal. "Come let us reason together, saith the Lord." See that humble Christian in his closet; he has just been dwelling upon the dangers he has encountered in his pilgrimage—he has just been looking into his heart, and has discovered his exceeding sinfulness. With the utmost agony, he exclaims, "I shall one day perish; Lord, who is sufficient?"—O wretched man! he turns over the pages of his Bible till he has reached 12th chap. 2nd Ep. Cor.; he reads to the 9th verse, but he can proceed no farther; a promise most suited to his case has arrested his attention. "My grace shall be sufficient for thee."

Behold yon distressed family; the youngest son is now reading to the rest 11th chap. John 23, 25, 26.

Observe in another house that old disciple, John 14, "Let not your hearts be troubled."

Divine arrangement—admirable order—precious promises; there must be a new kind of distress found out which cannot meet a suitable promise.

2. Exceeding precious also as to their certainty. Uncertainty is the very bane of enjoyment; but no such bane is in the Christian's pleasure, resulting from the promises. God has not only

passed his word, but has guaranteed that with his oath: thus giving both promise and oath a rock for both feet to stand on. A holdfast, as one expresses it, for both hands; for heaven and earth shall pass away before one jot or tittle of his word. On what page or leaf of inspiration is it recorded, that God is unfaithful to his promise? In what hour of a Christian's experience was it ever proved? No, never. His faithfulness engages him to perform what he has said. He can as soon cease to be God, as cease to accomplish his promises. Precious promises! who can estimate their worth?

Let us now,

III. Inquire how these promises are dispensed? They are said to be given to us.

1. This excludes all merit on the part of man.

2. Denotes perfect freeness.

3. Points to the medium through which they flow.

They are a river rising from the infinite depths of the Divine essence, flowing to us through the channel of the Saviour's wounds. I direct your view now to Calvary. See Jesus sealing your right to the covenant, and while the Jew beholds nothing but blood and water gushing from his

side, you, believer, may discover oceans of eternal life rolling from every wound. Every promise, if I may be allowed thus to express it, is a bond drawn on the treasury of heaven, and indorsed with the Saviour's blood. Millions of these have been presented for the pardon of sin, the assistance of the Spirit, the full enjoyment of glory; not one has ever been refused. O how precious is every promise! how much its value is enhanced by this thought; Jesus died to confirm it, for not one is made but in reference to his sufferings and death.

Let me now,

IV. Consider how these promises are to be received.

A promise is something proposed to us for our belief; and according as we give credit to what is said, we have faith in the declaration; it is precisely thus with respect to God's word. Here is the charter of the richest blessings that a mortal can receive; these being proposed to the Christian, Faith stretches forth her hand, receives the promise, and having received, enjoys it. Hence learn the necessity of faith; in the absence of this, the promises afford no comfort, no joy. When we doubt the validity of their claims, they appear like a rich and sumptuous table, but encompassed with a flaming sword, forbidding our approach. Ah, my brethren, it is unbelief, that sin, so abominable to God, so injurious to us; it

is that which robs us of our enjoyment ; it is our evil heart of unbelief that causes grief, sorrow, distress. What need have we to pray, " Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief."

V. Let us now consider how these promises should be used by us.

1. Endeavour to understand their right meaning. Mistaken apprehensions of Scripture have led thousands to deceive themselves with groundless consolations. I grant there is abundant consolation in the promises ; yet Christians often rear a fabric of comfort on a text which, upon examination, appears to be an unfit foundation. Thus the sacred oracle is perverted, and forced to speak what it never meant. The safest guide is to compare spiritual things with spiritual. Here it may not be improper to suggest, that you need not hesitate to appropriate those promises to your own situation, which are made to particular good men. How many myriads have rejoiced in that precious promise to Joshua : " I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." The rule here is, that whatever promises God makes to any of his people, in situations and for reasons that equally concern others, are applicable to all ; for whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope ; yea, I go farther ; even those promises

made to particular persons in peculiar cases, though not in their whole extent, yet so far as cases and circumstances agree, may be applied for the encouragement of others. Hence the promise to Solomon of wisdom, riches, and honour, above all that went before, is applicable, in its full extent, to Solomon alone; but who will deny that it gives encouragement to every Christian to ask wisdom of God to direct; nay, even a larger measure of wisdom in time of emergency. Consider also the promise of the Spirit, made by Christ to the Apostles, that he should teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance. Though from this promise we are not warranted to expect extraordinary inspiration and miraculous powers, yet does it afford no encouragement to us to expect from the Spirit, all that illumination, guidance, and instruction, which our several circumstances require?

2. But I observe, that a second use of the promises, is to treasure them up in the memory. It is not enough to look at them now and then, but you must be thoroughly acquainted with them; they must be stored up in the memory; and how can this faculty of the soul be better employed, than in becoming the repository of Divine truth? My young friends, I address this with peculiar earnestness to you. Now the me-

mory is retentive, the intellectual powers vigorous ; the brain is not yet impervious ; let no day pass without adding a promise to the stock which you before had learnt.

The advantages of this practice are great and numerous, beyond all calculation. How much would it tend to check that prevailing levity which is too, too common among Christians ! What matter for meditation would these promises afford. When we sit solitary in our house, or walk by the way what sweet, agreeable, instructive companions, would these precious promises prove ! What matter would they afford for conversation when Christians meet ! How much more becoming their characters, as Christians, than that criminal frivolity which so much prevails ! How would some sweet promise, brought seasonably to remembrance, tend to quell the rising fear and crush anxious solicitude, even while in embryo.

What unspeakable advantages would these promises be in prayer ! With what boldness may a Christian come to a throne of grace ! With what holy confidence look up to God, when his mouth is filled with arguments which God himself hath suggested ! With what comfort may the Christian address himself to God in Christ, pouring out the desires of his heart, when he considers the repeated assurances that his prayers shall be heard ! With how much satisfaction he

offers up the several desires of his heart, when those texts recur to his memory, in which the very mercies which he needs are promised.

What advantage, also, would be the recollection of the promises, through the whole of our spiritual warfare! What heroic zeal, what Christian courage, what holy intrepidity, what unshaken valour, animates the soul of the believer, when in the lively exercise of faith, he views the promises of grace to assist in every time of need! How eagerly he rushes to the combat, when he remembers, that in all things he shall be more than a conqueror! How nobly he fights the battles of faith, when he hears his Lord saying, "Fear not, I am with thee." How his eyes sparkle when he hears that sound: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

2 PETER I. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the Divine nature.

It now remains for me to consider further,

The great design for which the promises are given—"That ye might be," &c. &c.

The effects of Divine power, wisdom, goodness, are every where visible throughout the whole creation. Every creature, in some respects, represents God its creator; some in virtues, some in life, and some in being only. The material universe represents him as a house does a builder; but spiritual beings, as a child does a father: other creatures carry his footstool; man his image. Hence, by the promises, we are partakers of the Divine nature, or, in other words, bear his image.

I. Here we shall inquire in what respects we are partakers of the Divine nature? It is not a participation of the Divine essence. It is not in this sense that we become partakers of the Divine nature, but by a conformity of soul to the moral perfections of Jehovah; his mercy, his holiness, his truth, his righteousness. "Hence," says the Apostle Paul, "we all, as with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, as from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord;" and hence the soul is said to be created in Christ Jesus, after the image of God. It is a conformity to God in the dispositions of the heart. Is God love? The soul of a Christian participates in this disposition; as Jehovah loves himself as the greatest and best of all beings, the Christian's supreme love is fixed upon him. It is an affection excited by him: "We love him, be-

cause," &c. It is a love that terminates in him : " Whom have I in heaven but thee," &c. Is God the holy, holy, holy Lord God of heaven ? We partake of his holiness ; not that we are as holy as God, but as all our holy thoughts, desires, aspirations, are streams from this ever, over-flowing source, they must participate of the nature of the source whence they flow.

Is God happy ? we participate of his felicity ; for to be holy and to be happy are things so closely connected, that they cannot exist separately. God is inclined, by the nature of his perfections, and by the spirit of that covenant which bears this inscription, " To the praise of the glory of his grace ;" to render, like himself, in regard to felicity, those who are like him in purity and love. Hence it is we shall be like him, when we see him as he is ; but this participation of the Divine image will appear more illustrious, if we consider a few of its properties.

1. It is a vital image ; it is not only an image of one that lives, but it is itself a living image. It is not a senseless picture, a dumb show, an unmoving statue, but a living, walking, spiritual image ; like that by which the child resembles the father ; not an image drawn with the pencil, that exhibits only colour and figure ; but such as we see in a glass, that represents life, motion ; for where there is a participation of the Divine nature, life discovers itself in a thousand ways.

It is the want of this, that constitutes sinners spiritually dead.

2. It is an inward representation, not merely an outward show. It is not, says an old divine, a skin-deep glory, such as shone on the face of Moses, which could be covered with a veil. It is thoroughly transformative. It changes the whole soul, not only in external appearance, but in inward nature; all outward embellishments would give little felicity to a soul putrifying with worms of corruption, bred in itself. That would be only painting a sepulchre. But this image gives life within. Religion is like a grain of mustard-seed; it takes root in the heart, and grows up in the life.

3. It is an image perfectly congenial to the new man, not a thing foreign to his nature, put into him purposely to torment and vex him; but a beloved, well-known inhabitant, that had place in his heart from the beginning, and which shall dwell there, till sin, that wretched intruder, is expelled from the soul. This image restores rest, and hushes the storm which sin had occasioned; it makes the soul the abode of life and peace. It is not raging life, or stupid peace, but a life hid with Christ in God; a placid, tranquil life; not the life of a fury, or the peace of a stoic, but a life that has peace in it, and a peace that possesses life.

4. It is an image which is daily increasing, and will at last arrive at perfection. We go from strength to strength, and are changed into the same image from glory to glory. The likeness of the Divine nature is now complete in all its parts, and soon shall it be perfect in all its degrees. When the lineaments of the new creature shall all appear; even those that are now often obscure, every line of glory, shall shine conspicuous. The whole of the portrait of Jehovah's nature shall bear its exact symmetry, and all its perfection be visible at once; there will remain no blindness of mind, no error of judgment, no perverseness of will, no irregularity of affections; all shall be holiness and happiness: God shall put his last hand to this image of himself; this will be at the moment when the body sleeps in death.

II. You are now anxiously inquiring how the promises effect this change, or whence they derive their transforming efficacy, by which they make us partakers of the Divine nature. Need any Christian who has felt the power of the Gospel upon his heart, to be informed, that it is by means of the truth in the hand of the Spirit, that his soul is gradually assimilated into the likeness of God? "Sanctify them by thy truth, saith Christ to the Father; thy word is truth:" and what is sanctification in all its progressive stages, but participating of the Divine nature? However

the Spirit might operate in the minds of some, without the truth (for we do not limit Him whose ways are past finding out), yet the ordinary way by which souls are converted and established in Christ, is by means of the application of truth to the mind. But the promises do not act mechanically or physically upon the mind ; as the sun shines, then would they produce the same effect in all. It is the truth, or the promise in the hand of the Spirit ; it is this that gives the word its double edge ; that makes it quick and powerful, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. No feature of God's image is drawn upon the soul, but by the pencil of the Spirit. If we appear adorned with the beauties of holiness, it is his almighty hand that pourtrays the whole. If we appear as priests unto God, by him we are anointed. If we are arrayed in royal robes, by him we are clothed. If we are conquerors, it is he that gives victory. If we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, it is by him we are prepared. But the promises operate in making us partakers of the Divine nature, by way of external motive. What prevailing influence should the promise of pardon have upon our lives ! What an encouragement to faith ! What an incentive to deep and godly repentance ! What a sense of the evil of sin, and what a hatred to it is it calculated to produce in the mind ! What a powerful persuasive to evangelical obedience is the promise of

the Holy Spirit ! How eagerly does the merchant engage in commerce, the warrior in battle, with only a probability of success ; but had they certainty, how much more ardent would be their efforts ! Christian, that certainty is your's ; you enter the field, certain of conquest : “ having, then, these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.” In the humble path of duty fear no difficulty, dread no danger, shrink from no affliction, despair of no success. The Christian, armed by the Spirit with the promise of God, is omnipotent, invincible. What a motive to wean us from the world, and fix our affections on things that are above, is the promise of glory ! How operative upon the mind and conduct are such reflections as these ! I have the promise of happiness perpetual, in duration, and vast beyond all imagination, such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart conceived, and shall I fix my affections on any thing short of this ? I bear the image of God ; shall I defile it with sin ? I am travelling towards heaven ; shall I defile my garment by the way ? Ye regions of bliss, dwell perpetually in my view ! Ye mansions of glory, seize my attention, that it may be diverted from all inferior scenes !

III. But I now proceed to consider the necessity there is, that the promises should produce this effect upon the soul.

1. I observe, that this is the very design for which they are given. The design of God in giving us the promises, is more to render us holy than to render us comfortable ; for many of these promises relate to things that are not for the present joyous, but grievous—I mean afflictions. The first end of God in all his promises, as well as all his actions, is to render us like himself.

2. To answer the designs of God in all the dispensations of his providence towards us. Why are we called to scorch in the furnace, or wade in the waters of affliction, but that we may lose our dross, and have our defilement washed away, and bear more resemblance to his image? The grand design is, that we might be partakers of the Divine nature. Providence, whether it roll in thunder, or descend like dew upon the tender herb, has one design, that we might be partakers of the Divine nature. All its complicated events are like the scaffolding round the building, which, as soon as the edifice is complete, shall be set aside. God, though uniform in his end, has various means to accomplish it.

3. The necessity of our being partakers of the Divine nature, appears from the scheme of our redemption. This has two grand branches, the destruction of Satan's image in the soul, and the recovery of the Divine likeness. Christ died, not

only to redeem us from all evil, but to give us the possession of all good ; and what is so great a good as being like him who is the fountain of all good ?

4. I add also, that it is the design of the Spirit's habitation to transform us into the image of God. When Satan perceived that he was unable to injure the essence of God, he struck at his portrait, and dashed it in pieces. To restore this ruined image, was the design of the Spirit's mission ; for this, he takes up his residence in the soul of man, diffusing his influence through every faculty, adapting his operations to every grace and every frame of the soul: all his convictions, all his sacred impulses, all his quickening admonitions, all his keen reproofs, are for this end, that we might be partakers of the Divine nature. But I observe,

5thly and lastly, its necessity appears, if we consider, that without being like God, we cannot enjoy him. How can two walk together, except they be agreed ? What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness ? What communion hath light with darkness, and what concord hath Christ with Belial ? Be assured, that except ye partecipe of the Divine nature, ye can never enjoy the Divine presence. He is a consuming fire to all but those who are like him. From necessity of nature, he must hate every thing opposite to himself. 'Twas for sin he ex-

pelled myriads of spirits from paradise, and shall he again receive polluted, unrenewed sinners into heaven? All heaven would be unhappy, if one unholy spirit gained admission there. But allowing that the order of heaven could be dispensed with, can it be supposed possible, that Jehovah should open the celestial gates to admit an unsanctified soul? Could such a soul be happy there? with what society would he converse? Angels and spirits made perfect would shun him—the holy air of the new Jerusalem would be too pure for him—the songs of Zion would afford him no delight—the sight of God would be terror to him—heaven itself would be a place of torment. Yes, in the very midst of glory, he would find his hell! How necessary, then, that, by the promises, we should be made partakers of the Divine nature!

I. Learn the privilege of the Christian. How rich your inheritance—how extensive your possessions—how durable your portion! Come, ascend the mount of Pisgah. Look over the promised land—survey thine estate.

How different your situation might have been! You deserved nothing but misery, but you receive nothing but mercy. Christian, bear your testimony, confirm the truth of the text: are not the promises exceeding great, exceeding precious? All that you can want in time, all that you need for eternity, is here guaranteed. Aged Christians; ye who have borne the heat and burthen

of the day, to you I appeal, Is he not faithful that hath promised? What have you not already received?

2. Learn hence the design of God concerning his people, to make them partakers of the Divine nature.

O! wonderful grace, astonishing condescension, that we should be called the sons of God! The design of God, as I just now told you, is, by the promises, to render us like himself in *love*. Do you enter into this plan? Are your endeavours, with a humble dependance on the Spirit, to have this feature formed in you? Ah! could we look into your hearts, could we see the face of the soul, what defilement on the sacred picture, occasioned by secret sins, presumptuous faults, criminal backslidings! O Christians, is it thus ye grieve the Holy Spirit? Enter more and more into the design of God. In *felicity*—are you seeking from heavenly objects your happiness? Why, then, that love to the world? why that coldness in spiritual things—that vivacity in worldly pleasures? We cannot share the second transformation which souls experience in glory, without experiencing the first which takes place on earth. If we would be like God in heaven, we must be partakers of the Divine nature on earth: a soul having these features is prepared for eternity; when it enters heaven, it will not alter its condition, but only perfect it; then shall

that most beautiful of all objects that can present itself to the eyes of such a soul, the Divine Redeemer, the model of its image, the original of its character, gratify our minds for ever.

COLOSSIANS II. 10.

And ye are complete in him.

I. EXPLAIN the doctrine.

II. Confirm the fact, and

III. Improve both.

I. Explain the doctrine.

“Complete”—perfect.

Apply it to a work—to a building—to a series.
“Ye are,”—the whole church—the individual believer. “In *him*”—he is all in all. But how are ye “complete?”

1. As to your acceptance with the Father.

2. State in the world—complete outfit.

3. Title to heaven.

4. Meetness for it.

II. Confirm the fact,

1. From the constitution of Christ's person.

2. The perfection of his work.

3. The nature of the relation which subsists between Christ and all believers.

A relation of substitution as to merit.

A relation of derivative vitality which is indissoluble.

A relation of the dearest affinity, and on the part of the Saviour, of ardent and unquenchable attachment.

A relation constituted and eternal between dependance and power, emptiness and fullness, reception and bestowment.

A relation of immortality.

4. All this is confirmed by the declaration and tenor of the Scriptures.

5. By the experience of all Christians.

III. Improve both the doctrine and the fact.

Here, Christians, behold

1. Your honour.
 2. Your security.
 3. Your happiness.
 4. Your obligations.
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LUKE XXIII. 39—43.

*And one of the malefactors which were hanged
railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save
thyself and us.*

*But the other answering rebuked him, saying,
Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the
same condemnation?*

*And we indeed justly; for we receive the due
reward of our deeds: but this man hath done
nothing amiss.*

*And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me,
when thou comest into thy kingdom.*

*And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto
thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in para-
dise.*

THESE words present to our view three individuals in very peculiar and affecting circumstances.

They are the children of humanity ; they have minds which can be tortured with the agony of thought, and bodies that can be lacerated with the instruments of cruelty and death.

They are all sufferers.

They are all suffering, as criminals, an ignominious death.

But amidst these circumstances of resemblance, the text teaches us to discriminate ; the characters of the sufferers are not the same.

The first, innocent—the second, guilty but penitent—the third, guilty and condemned.

They differ in their destiny : one to the throne of heaven, another to paradise, the last to the regions of despair.

This scene unfolds to us,

I. The evil nature of sin.

II. The peculiar glories of the gospel.

I. In this scene we behold the evil nature of sin in two points of view.

1. In its enmity against God and goodness ; and,

2. In the sufferings which it inflicts.

1. In its enmity against God and goodness.

(1). This appears in the base injustice of the

chief priests and rulers, in crucifying the Lord of glory.

(2). In the mad opposition of the impenitent and expiring malefactor.

2. In the sufferings which it inflicts.

(1). It is but imputed to Christ, and behold the man!

(2). It is to be forgiven in one of the malefactors; and see the anguish of remorse, the tears of penitential sorrow.

(3). It is to wreak eternal vengeance on the head of the other sufferer; and contemplate, I beseech you, a man ripening for hell, transforming into a dæmon under the ribs of death.

But this scene is to us most highly interesting,

II. As it exhibits the peculiar glory of Christianity.

It is, we see, all the

1. *Virtues* of Christianity, shining in the lustre of the sun of righteousness.

Benevolence the most warm, disinterested, extensive, and energetic.

Zeal for the honour of God, ready obedience to the Divine will.

Magnanimity ;—could have commanded legions of angels.

Patience under a sense of injury.

Resignation ;—ready forgiveness of injuries. The malefactor just before reviled him.

Godlike compassion ! he not only forgives, he sympathizes, he saves. This constellation of virtues shone on Calvary, when Jesus exclaimed, “ Verily, verily,” &c.

2. This scene also displays some of the most distinguished and glorious *doctrines* of the Gospel.

The divinity of its author—his royal prerogatives and kingdom—the value of his atonement—the justifying nature of faith—the certainty of a future state—the existence of the soul as separate and distinct from the body ;—its instantaneous happiness or misery after death.

3. But in this scene we behold the glory of Christianity in another point of view,—in the *grace* which it displays.

(1). This is sovereign and free.

(2). In its adaptation to the feelings, wants, weaknesses, and sorrows of the human heart, and in every possible state of human existence. This is an extreme case ; but then it strengthens

the argument, that the gospel of Christ is the religion of humanity. If it can extend its assistance to the lowest and most degraded, and to the hour of dissolution, it can render help to all the intermediate classes; and in all the inferior circumstances of pain and sorrow;—the greater proves the less.

(3). We see here, also, the mighty efficacy of the Gospel in transforming the character and producing in the most depraved, a meetness for glory and immortality.

Behold and admire the change.

Prayer and zeal succeed blasphemy; love, hatred and opposition; faith, unbelief;—and faith of the most distinguished kind.

Obedience, sin—as far as obedience could be practised.

In this narrative we perceive that the Gospel can do every thing, but save a man against his will.

It reached to one malefactor; but why was it not extended to the other? he refused, he despised. But could not the grace which melted the one, have softened the other? Undoubtedly. Why did it not? We can assign no other reason than the awful sovereignty of Jehovah. Is this unsatisfactory? Who art thou that repliest against God? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with

much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction :—

Chain'd to his throne a volume lies,
With all the fates of men ;
With every angels form and size,
Drawn by the Eternal pen.

His providence unfolds the book,
And makes his councils shine ;
Each opening leaf and ev'ry stroke
Fulfil some deep design.

Here he exalts neglected worms
To sceptres and a crown ;
Anon the following page he turns,
And treads the monarch down.

Not Gabriel asks the reason why,
Nor God the reason gives ;
Nor dares the favourite angel pry
Between the folded leaves.

The sum of what has been said, seems to be
this—

Jesus Christ is able to save lost mankind.

He is willing to save the vilest sinners.

He can save in the last extremity.

MATTHEW XX. 32.

What will ye that I shall do unto you ?

WHAT can be more pleasing than with our mind's eye to follow the footsteps of one who went about doing good ? Many of you, no doubt, have frequently realized the scenes through which our Saviour passed, during the short period in which he exercised his ministry upon earth. Imagination has transported you to the regions of Judea ; and, with the most heartfelt satisfaction, you have, as it were, beheld with your own eyes the active benevolence of the Son of God. You have seen the tongue of the dumb loosed, and the lame man leaping like the hart. The extinguished orbs of the blind you have witnessed suddenly darting light and joy and gratitude. The tears of a disconsolate mother for the loss of an only son, you have beheld at once suppressed by his unexpected resurrection from death unto life. You have beheld the Redeemer in all the majesty of a God, exercising the compassion of a Saviour ; displaying at once the power of Omnipotence, and the tenderest feelings of humanity.

In both these points of view we behold him

in the text. His compassion induces him to inquire into the wants of the miserable—his power enables him to remove them: “What will ye that I shall do unto you?”

In the 1st place, Let us view the circumstances connected with this question; and,

Indly, Inquire into the obvious import of the question itself; in the

1st place, we are to contemplate the circumstances connected with this question.

It is a tale of sorrow in the commencement, but in the end the sorrow is turned into joy. Two beings, completely wretched, solicit the aid of Jesus; they are blind and they are poor. To be blind is a dreadful calamity; to roll the sightless eye-ball, searching for day, and to find all dark, irrecoverably dark—where, among all the ills that flesh is heir to, can one be found more truly distressing? But to have poverty united to blindness;—sad association! to be forced, not only to drink of the cup of misery, but to have the remainder of its contents poured on the visual ray, to quench its fires, and to extinguish its light for ever—this, surely, is the last gradation in the scale of wretchedness! yet this was the bitter portion of these two blind men; they were sitting by the way-side begging. I see them, in my mind's eye, sitting under the shadow of some

hedge or tree against the side of the road, listening, to apprehend if any traveller were approaching, of whom they may ask a small pittance of alms ; they hear a sound of footsteps at a distance—it draws nearer and nearer. Hope, the kind companion of the wretched, who have no other friend, beams upon their soul with her heavenly ray : they inquire who approaches, and being told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, they cried, “ Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on us !”

How appropriate is this address. The mighty Deliverer was passing by, who could not only give them alms, but eyes ; not only afford them a temporary relief, but could at once for ever banish their malady and their wretchedness. For mercy the Son of David was celebrated ; mercy was the plea of these men, and it was a plea which they vehemently urged ; but the ruthless tongues of the multitude would drown their supplicating voice. Brethren, men feel but little for the miseries of their fellow-creatures ; the cry of the beggar is disregarded, and it is often violently suppressed. Selfishness, pride, indifference, frequently steel the heart against compassion ; but how cruel was the opposition of the multitude to these poor men, and how difficult to ascertain the motives which influenced their conduct. Perhaps they were envious of the growing reputation of Jesus, or it may be, they thought the present suppliants too mean for

him to notice, or their miseries to be beyond the extent of his power. However this was, they rebuked them. And the fate of these blind men was only what every person meets with who applies to Christ for mercy ; there are always a thousand clamorous voices to suppress the ardent breath of prayer. But when men are sensible of their miseries, when they are brought in earnest to seek deliverance, no clamours can depress, no opposition can silence ; thus it was with the blind suppliants : they cried yet the more, “ Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on us ; ” the sounds of distress thrilled in the ears of the Mediator—they arrest him in his journey—he cannot take another step—he stood. What cannot prayer do ? “ Once the sun of nature stood still at the desire of Joshua, who was eager to complete his victory ; and lo, now the Sun of righteousness stands still with healing in his wings, at the desire of two blind men who beg a cure.” He stood and called them. “ What will ye that I shall do unto you ? ” are the gracious accents which fall from his lips. Almost breathless with expectation, they reply, “ Lord, that our eyes may be opened ; so Jesus had compassion on them,” adds the historian, “ and touched their eyes, and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.”

In these circumstances we observe a remarkable coincidence.

1st. In point of place—chance is a word often

used in human affairs; and when it is not meant to exclude the Providence of God, but merely to signify circumstances that occur without foreknowledge or pre-arrangement on our part, it is certainly accurate and proper, and I know of no better term by which to express the same ideas. In this sense, we may say, chance brought these men and the Saviour together, at this particular spot. But that which appears merely casual to us, was ordered and disposed by him who knows the end from the beginning. When the blind men set out in the morning to take their station for the day, they had no particular reason for choosing the road where Jesus was to pass. On the part of our Lord there seems no premeditation; he might have taken another path; the men might have remained at home, or taken some other direction. And had this been the case, their blindness and their misery would have remained; but this was the destined place: here they were to meet with Jesus, and here they were to be restored to sight. This, though apparently a circumstance of little moment, was to these men a link of amazing importance in the chain of Divine Providence. On incidents thus trifling in human estimation, frequently depend the happiness or the misery of life. Perhaps I am at this moment pointing some of you to a particular page in your own history. I may be leading you back to the interesting spot where you first received spiritual sight. You

entered a place of worship; the minister in the pulpit had no knowledge of your care; yet he chose a text, the most appropriate to your condition. In its discussion, he entered minutely into your views and feelings; you were ready to exclaim, "Behold a man who told me all that ever I did!" you were pricked to the heart; "old things passed away, and all things became new;" whereas, had you gone to any other place, had any other minister preached, or had he chosen any other subject, you might have remained the same careless, insensible creature as ever; but the time to visit you, yea the set time, was come, and place, and minister, and subject were only things of secondary moment, which were all ordered, arranged, and produced by an all-gracious God, who, while he seems to do nothing, does every thing. Thus it happened to the blind mendicants; this was the particular place; the Divine hand led them thither by a way which they knew not; and it was there the Saviour must needs pass, "and the time was the time of Love."

Observe again

2. A remarkable coincidence

In the importunity of the men, and in the compassion of the Saviour. Had they prayed but once, they would not have obtained their suit—had they addressed any of the multitude, they could not have received sight; for had they

been endowed with the power; we see they were destitute of the heart. They felt not for the misery of poor beggars by the way-side; they even angrily attempted to silence them, but they were happily importunate—they cried the more; and it was for mercy, and it was to one who never suffered the suppliant to pray in vain; it was to one who made every misery he saw his own. We are not surprised, then, that Jesus stops, that he kindly inquires into their case. If he had passed on without regarding these poor men, sinners would always have had this instance of a Saviour's apparent neglect to discourage them. If he had answered them at the first, his conduct might, on the other hand, have encouraged presumptuous expectations. But the blind men were importunate, and the Saviour was compassionate: their extremity was his opportunity; but,

3. We are struck with a remarkable agreement or coincidence between the misery of the men and the ability of the mediator.

To lose the eyes, is to lose the most precious senses of man—to have the windows of the soul closed with a seal which no man can break, is an awful calamity. Many disorders of the human frame vanish before the application and efforts of art. But real blindness baffles the skill of the oculist, and mocks the ingenuity of man; no power but that which is confessedly Divine can

reach it; nothing but a miracle can give sight to the blind. The case of these men was, to all human appearance, hopeless. The multitude, perhaps, were provoked at their folly in expecting even that Jesus of Nazareth could do any thing for them; but they had faith to believe the mighty power of God; and inveterate as was their blindness, deplorable as was their state, they were persuaded that Jesus the Son of David could help them; and they were not mistaken. Jesus stood still and called them; he touched their eyes, and immediately their eyes received sight. The touch of Omnipotence is here! surely God was here, and they knew it not. Surely, in beholding this instance of power, we are led to think of him who has all nature at his control; who speaks, and it is done—who commands, and it stands fast! and if he kindly asks any of us, “What will ye that I shall do unto you?” we may frankly open to him all our hearts, and spread before him all our wants, with a full assurance, that his arm can even pluck a brand from the everlasting burning! But, turning from the blind men and their circumstances, we come to consider the doctrines and lessons of instruction which we may derive from this question, and the narrative with which it is connected. We are

II. To inquire into the obvious import of the question, “What will ye that I shall do unto

you?" Two observations will fully illustrate what I intend by this inquiry.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ will always make men sensible of their wants before he gives them relief.

2. And as soon as they know their necessities, and apply to him, he will answer their request and supply their wants.

1. It may be considered as a gospel axiom, as a fundamental principle, that the Lord Jesus will always have men sensible of their wants before he administers to them relief. This remark arises out of his conduct. Observe him going about doing good. Whom does he bless?—the righteous—the conceited, those who fancy themselves rich and increased in goods? No; the whole need not a physician, but those who are sick. All that our Lord cured in the gospel were persons sensible of their wants. You recollect the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda: what brought this man to the pool?—a sense of his wants.

The woman with the issue of blood was a lively instance of misery felt and lamented. Trembling, and yet believing, she touched the hem of his garment. The nobleman, in behalf of his son, addressed the Saviour in this earnest language: "Come down ere my child die."

And the Syro-Phenician woman was deeply sensible of the wants of her daughter. Thus the observation just mentioned is confirmed by the conduct of Christ ; and it is equally

2. Evident from the very constitution of the Gospel.

The Gospel is a constitution of mercy, devised for the relief of the miserable and the necessitous ; it is intended for the wretched, and for them alone ; it fails of its efficacy while we are careless and unconcerned ; it is perfectly useless, except to those who know their absolute need of it ; its great design is to bring men back to God, as the source of all happiness, and to depend upon him alone, in every way, for every thing. The grand principle of apostacy was a departure from God in both these respects ; it consisted in man's setting himself up as an independent being : this was and is the source of all his miseries ; and it is essentially necessary that he should be made to know this, to feel his own entire helplessness, wretchedness, and dependance ; for till he is made acquainted with these, he will never earnestly inquire after God. Now, all the merciful dispensations of God have had this for their object—to bring men powerfully to feel their wants and their miseries as sinners ! for this it was, that the Almighty issued the law from Sinai—that men might feel they were sinners,

in order that they might inquire anxiously after a Saviour. The Gospel is intended to drive them from every false refuge, to bring them to the last extremity ; and when, through the agency of the Divine Spirit, it has effected this, it meets them in the very achme of their distress, declaring it to be “ a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.”—But

3. Jesus Christ would have men feel their wants before he gives them relief ; to teach them the important lesson, that they cannot cure themselves. It is the determination of God in the salvation of guilty men, that no flesh shall glory in his presence.

But it is the disposition of every fallen creature to glory in himself, and in his own performances. It is the essence of that spirit of independence which led to the fatal apostacy, and which has continued the prime feature in the human heart ever since. It is this which leads men to work out a righteousness for themselves : this is the reason of that deep-rooted enmity which they display against the pure unadulterated Gospel, and its faithful preachers ; and this is the cause why, after having felt deep convictions of sin, they are so reluctant to commit their souls into the hands of Jesus, and to relinquish all dependance on their own power and

might; but to this they must be brought, and nothing but the agency of the Divine Spirit can effect it.

4. God will have men sensible of their wants before he relieves them, that they may pray more earnestly for the blessing.

But we now proceed

II. To show, that as soon as a man is sensible of his wants, so soon is the Lord ready to give him relief.

1. I might prove this from all the instances in the Bible.

2. From the compassion of his nature. Our Lord had the most tender feelings of any man upon earth—the tender compassion of a God—the tender feelings of a man—the tender feelings of a mediator;—the tender feelings arising from more than thirty years practical experience of the miseries of human life.

Can our Lord help if he will? Is there any state of man, of soul, or body, that he cannot relieve?

If there is perfection of feeling, and if there is perfection of ability, what hinders the relief? Here is the affection of a Saviour, and the ability of a God.

3. This may be argued from his office—bro-

ther, a physician, an overseer : our Lord is under obligations to give relief.

IMPROVEMENT.

1. What is it that you want ?
 2. Do you pray ?
 3. What have you received ?
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ROMANS III. 24.

Being justified freely by his grace.

IN discoursing from these words, we shall

- I. Explain the nature of gospel justification.
- II. Point you to the source from whence it is derived.
- III. The means by which it is secured.
- IV. Direct you to the manner in which it is conveyed.

I. Explain the nature of gospel justification, or show you in what it consists. It is a blessing of inconceivable magnitude. Justification has reference to the sinner, solely, as guilty. To justify a sinner is simply to acquit him from all the charges which a holy law may allege against him: and thus it is changing his state. It considers him as righteous, who was before a criminal. The simple act of justification is perfectly distinct from forgiveness; though the justification of a sinner necessarily implies forgiveness. When a judge forgives a man who is found guilty before him, he does not justify him; it is merely an act of lenity; but when full restitution is made to the laws, and the penalty which transgression deserves is paid to the uttermost farthing, then the person is fully acquitted; he is not merely forgiven, he is justified; and he has a right and title to life. Thus justification is usually considered as consisting of two parts; but this is scarcely accurate.

Justification is simply acquittal, a declaring a person righteous: his title to life follows this as a natural consequence, and is inseparably connected with it. Justification makes a man a fit object for the Divine favour; he is replaced in the situation which, by his transgression, he had lost; and has a right to expect, what every other holy being possesses,—the presence of God, and the enjoyment of him for ever; and

as the person by whose obedience and sacrifice he is justified, expressly, in the covenant of redemption, stipulates with his Father the bestowment of eternal life on all for whom he should die; the sinner, for whom he died, being justified, has an indisputable right to the Divine inheritance, which is the purchase of a Saviour's blood. This brings us to consider,

II. The means by which this blessing became ours ;—through the redemption that is in Christ.

This Redemption consisted in obeying the law for us, and in our stead; and in suffering all the penalty due to our sin. This redemption was accomplished by Christ, the anointed of God, who, from the ages of eternity, was set apart for the express purpose. In order to this, Christ, who had an absolute control over himself, assumed our nature, became a voluntary servant, and the legislator made himself subject to his own law: his dignity and independance gave merit to his obedience, and efficacy to his sufferings and death; in fact, the whole of his undertaking was obedience; but one part was active. This was his righteousness, which is imputed to us; the other was passive, which was our atonement; by the imputation of which, also, we are freed from the curse of the law, and become entitled to justification, deliverance from guilt, and eternal happiness.

But we are directed,

III. By the Apostle, to the source from whence all this is derived :—grace, pity ; this had reference to our misery :—mercy ; this had respect to our guilt ; it was grace which formed the plan—it was grace which made the sacrifice—grace which bestowed the consequent blessings : it all originated in God. But here let us

IV. Contemplate the manner in which it is conveyed to us “ freely,” without condition or pre-requisite ; because it was utterly undeserved—because it is imparted readily : it flows freely as water from a fountain.

But, say some, how can this be free, and how can it be the result of grace, when you describe it as the effect of purchase ? and that which a man is entitled to by purchase, can hardly be said to come to him as free ; it is justice, not grace. Granted is all this ; yet we maintain it is all free grace still ; it is grace to us. God was under no obligation to accept the obedience and righteousness of Christ instead of ours. This was only his own gracious devise, in order that he might save man consistently with his divine perfections. It is true, the Father was pleased to bind himself in the covenant which he made with his Son ; and, as the grand condition of the covenant, he is bound to justify and to glorify all for whom Christ died ; but Christ alone can

claim this ; it is justice to him, but pure unmixed grace to us.

LUKE XVII. 5.

And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

THIS prayer is highly interesting, and fraught with instruction.

As it respects the *person* addressed, it shows that our Lord Jesus Christ is the proper object of divine worship, which was not only rendered him by the ignorant multitude, but by his own disciples.

As it respects the *petitioners*, it shows that the most eminent Christians, even the apostles of Christ, have need to pray, and especially to pray for faith.

As the petition respects *faith*, it shows the importance of this grace in the Christian life.

By faith we are said to live, to stand, to walk ; by faith we suffer, and in faith we die.

Faith is indeed a principal subject of disquisition and encomium in the New Testament. It is so important in the scheme of Christianity as to be considered equivalent to Christianity itself.

The whole doctrine of the apostles is termed the faith—the faith once delivered to the saints.

In discoursing from these words, I shall

I. Make some observations illustrative of the nature of faith.

II. Show that faith admits of degrees, and is capable of increase.

III. Enforce the propriety and importance of all Christians adopting this prayer as their own.

1. Faith is the medium of the knowledge we derive from testimony, and must be carefully distinguished from sense and reason.

Sense is the medium by which we obtain that knowledge which strikes immediately upon the senses. Reason, of that which we derive by reflecting upon, and comparing the testimony of our senses, which we deduce from a process of argument more or less long and complicated.

Whatever is proposed to the senses must be something visible, palpable, and present; whatever is offered to reason must be within the verge of the understanding.

But the province of faith relates to objects invisible, spiritual, and incomprehensible. Reason cannot receive a mystery; but mystery, in comprehensibleness, forms no objection to faith; it is, on the contrary, rather a recommendation to,

its assent, if the testimony which commands that assent be clear and credible. We are not, however, called upon to believe we know not what, or we know not why: no, faith is so much an act of reason as to require that we understand the simple meaning of the proposition we are to believe, and likewise the grounds of credibility upon which it challenges our assent.

Faith is the medium of receiving those truths which God has communicated by his inspired servants, which we receive upon his authority, which are not objects of sense, and could not be discovered or comprehended by reason. Hence it necessarily implies a revelation, and nothing which is not revealed in the word of God is, in the Scripture sense of the term, an object of faith.

2. Faith, however, is not a bare assent of the understanding to the doctrines of the Bible. It comprehends considerably more than this. It implies not only cordial assent, but a solid persuasion of the veracity, and reliance on the faithfulness of God.

3. This faith is a spiritual principle in the mind, by which it realizes the attributes of God, the glories of the Redeemer, the economy of redemption; it is the only instrument of connexion with God—the only point of contact with the invisible state.

4. This faith is the seminal principle of all holiness and virtue, the seed by which all other graces are produced by a sort of spiritual vegetation, and from which only they can derive sustenance and growth.

5. To this faith, and to this alone, the justification of our persons in the sight of God is annexed; but not on account of its being the seed or the spring of holiness, but merely as it is the simple instrument of taking hold of the Divine provision, made as the ground of our acceptance in the infinite merits of Christ. But it appears, from this prayer of the apostles, that faith is capable of increase. We may observe, then,

II. That faith, even when sincere and genuine, admits of degrees.

The principle of faith is implanted that it may increase. It is intended that the inner man should grow stronger and stronger; for it is to survive the outer; and when that is fallen into decay, to remain a receptacle of the Divine grace for ever. The tabernacle is to perish, but the graces that inhabit it are to subsist and flourish without end;—and these graces are sustained and animated by faith.

1. Faith admits of degrees as to its extent. The subjects of it may be increased; the number

of truths believed may be augmented. The sincere believer may at first have a very contracted view of the Christian scheme, which may, in course of time, be greatly enlarged by the perception and belief of, to him, new facts and doctrines.

But this, in strictness, is not an increase of faith, but an increase of knowledge. The principle of faith itself is not altered by any addition to its objects. The increase of a person's faith consists in the augmentation of its strength and intensity, not in any addition to his knowledge or enlargement of his creed.

2. In this sense, also, faith admits of continual increase. In the mind of many a humble and sincere believer, it is exceedingly feeble; it is but just strong enough to enable him to cast himself with trembling hope on the Divine Mercy. In others it has advanced to such a state of strength and vigour as to exclude all doubt and apprehension, and takes the name of the full assurance of faith.

3. One great employment of the apostles in the discharge of their ministerial office, was to augment and strengthen this Divine principle in the hearts of believers; to confirm their belief in the truths they had received and acknowledged; to perfect that which was lacking in their faith.

The principle of faith will, of necessity, be

always weaker than that of sight. The strongest conviction we can attain in this world of invisible realities and spiritual truths, will be far short of that which we shall attain in the world of glory; but it is impossible to say how near our Faith may approach to vision, how near we may live to heaven. Genuine believers are continually advancing to a more complete acquaintance and familiarity with the heavenly world, and none can say they have attained the most perfect and realizing degree of faith which, even here, it is possible to enjoy.

4. The subjects of faith are of two kinds—existing objects and future promises; and in reference to both these, faith is capable of increase. The attributes of God, the glories of the Redeemer, the economy of redemption, may all be rendered more habitually present, more visible and more palpable to the mind; and the happiness of the future state may become so clearly revealed to our faith, that though the hope of future good must necessarily be inferior to the possession, it shall still far exceed and transcend the highest present enjoyments we can here possess. As faith is thus capable of increase to enlarge and to strengthen, it must surely be highly desirable. And to enforce

III. The prayer of my text upon your minds, my hearers, that you may be led to adopt it as

your own, is the third and last object which I have in view, in the discussion of this subject. And in prosecuting my task, I shall derive my arguments from the advantages which an increase of faith will confer upon ourselves, and from the aspect which it bears towards the Divine glory.

1. Its advantages, as it respects ourselves, may be regarded as *affecting our happiness*, and as *affecting our holiness*.

1. Happiness. It was one principal design of Christianity to make men happier. The excellency of the Christian dispensation is manifest in the advantages which it connects incidentally with the prosecution of its ultimate end. The gospel is justly denominated good news ; it is glad tidings of great joy ; and faith renders it glad tidings to us. Our enjoyments will have a constant relation to our faith : the greater our faith, the greater our happiness.

(1). This effect it will have in delivering us from that perplexity which arises from an unsettled state of mind with regard to the truths of religion.

This is an affliction which embitters the life of many a sincere Christian ; and the best remedy for it is to cultivate the principles of vital religion in the heart. A stronger faith in the essentials of Christianity will produce a settlement of

mind respecting abstruser and more difficult points, which disputation will never afford.

(2). An increase of this divine principle will also relieve us from anxiety respecting our personal safety.

It is the nature of light, not only to manifest the existence of other things, but to manifest itself. At the dawn of day, while the light is yet extremely feeble, its very existence may appear questionable. The limit which divides light from darkness is so slight and indefinite, that we are in doubt whether to call it night or morning ; but the increasing power of the light evinces its genuine nature, and while it reveals other objects, removes all uncertainty respecting itself.

It may be very difficult to distinguish the grain of mustard seed, while in the state of seed, or in the early stages of vegetation, from the other small seeds ; but when it grows up into a plant, puts forth its stems, and becomes the largest of herbs, all doubt respecting its nature is dispelled. The faith of the Christian, in like manner, discovers its genuineness by its growth, and the increase of its power over the mind produces an increased conviction of its existence.

(3). The more we see of God in Christ, the more beauty will be perceived, and the more satisfaction enjoyed. All earthly glory is only a reflection, or rather it is only a shadow of the Divine glory.

If the contemplation of earthly excellence fills us with admiration, how much more will that of heavenly ! If the charms of a perishable world and the faculties of mortal creatures excite pleasurable sensations of wonder, how much more will the glories of the celestial kingdom and the attributes of the most high.

We are pleased to explore the progress of society and the policy of princes ; but how much nobler is it to trace the designs of Divine providence gradually unfolded, amidst the changes and revolutions of human affairs ! how much more delightful to watch the development of his scheme of mercy from the first disclosure to the final consummation of his purposes. What subject can be more transporting than the character of his Son, who was with him before the foundations of the world, and whose delights were with the sons of men ; whose appearance in our likeness was obscurely announced for the consolation of our first parents, prefigured by a multitude of types and emblems, and gradually declared with increasing certainty and precision by a succession of prophecies ! What more interesting than to contemplate his mysterious incarnation, his holy and beneficent life, to follow him in his humiliation, to behold the agonies of his crucifixion, and hail his entrance into the kingdom of glory ! If light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing to behold the material sun, how much more ra-

vishing and ecstatic to trace the course of the Sun of righteousness, and to be absorbed in the contemplation of his splendors. Who would exchange this for any other knowledge? Who would not exclaim with the Apostle, "Yea, doubtless," &c. How justly might he cry out, "God forbid that I should glory (he is not contented with saying believe, but glory;) God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He not only believed in the sacrifice of Christ, but rejoiced and gloried in it, which is the fruit of believing. The Christian, whose faith is thus increased, dwells in a calm and holy light, in the midst of a heavenly illumination which infuses joy and serenity into his soul. It discloses to him the invisible world, it reveals the wonders of futurity, it unveils the glory of God, and breaks down the barrier, by which his soul is prevented from rejoining and blending itself with the infinite Spirit. It removes the impediments to his intercourse with the blessed, it transports him into the very presence of the eternal. He is allowed to walk within the precincts of heaven, and to hear the multitudes of voices ascribing "blessing and honour and glory and power unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the lamb for ever and ever." Such are the transports which result from believing; such joy arises from faith; and as no stream can rise higher

than the fountain from which it springs, our faith is the measure of our joy.

2. But an increase of faith will have the most desirable influence on our sanctification.

(1). It will diminish our sensibility to the pleasures of sin. As far as our gratifications are criminal, it will destroy it and moderate it as far as it is innocent. The joys of earth will appear too feeble, transitory, and inconstant, too unworthy and unsatisfactory to engage the heart which has tasted the fruits of this precious faith. Every man has his favourite pleasure. We are sensitive creatures, led by the desire of enjoyment, and governed by the pleasures we prefer.

God has consulted this part of our nature in making our holiness conducive to our happiness, and rendering the delights of piety far superior to the pleasures of sin. The good man who has enjoyed the persuasion of his favour, the proofs of his love, has a new appetite imparted which controls every criminal desire, and makes him hunger and thirst after righteousness, his highest delight.

(2). Faith brings the strongest motives to holiness into contact with the mind.

Faith is so important to the growth of holiness, that it is represented as the seed from which

every virtue and grace of the Christian life originates.

This efficacy is *natural*, inasmuch as faith has a direct and proper tendency to produce and strengthen the other graces ; and it is *constituted*, inasmuch as faith unites us to Christ, from whom, as the branches from the root, we derive supplies of Divine help and influence. It is faith that lays hold of our eternal inheritance, and renders us indifferent to the calamities and afflictions of life : thus it produces resignation. The believer takes joyfully the spoiling of his goods, knowing that he has in heaven a better, an enduring substance : it works by love, it kindles a fire in the breast which grows stronger and stronger, and purifies the heart from all its pollutions : it works by hope, gives steadfastness to the soul, and opposes a shield to all the assaults of the tempter. “ Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ ? ”

(3). By faith, our eyes are kept fixed upon Jesus ; we are brought near to the fountain of influence, and receive out of his fulness, grace for grace.

Earnestly endeavour, therefore, to increase your faith.

II. Increase of faith is desirable, as it respects the Divine glory.

It glorifies God, by sanctifying the character

of his people ; “ Herein is your Father glorified that ye bring forth much fruit.” Thus your light will be made to shine forth among men, so that others seeing your good works, will glorify your Father which is in heaven. The perfections of God are revealed in the lives of his saints. They are to show forth the virtues of God.

Faith glorifies God, by renouncing all self-dependance and all hope from any other source than his mercy ; it makes us rich, yet consciously poor ; it realizes the veracity and faithfulness of the Divine character ; it confides in his unlimited power ; it leans on him in the dark, trusts him in all worlds, and takes his word for eternal happiness ; it looks forward upon his promise to the possession of joys, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived ; it unites itself to the vivifying principle which lives eternally and gives all things life, to that power which will in due time call into existence a wonderful scene of life, beauty and glory, which the visible world cannot contain. It attaches itself to the footstool of the Divine throne, and feels itself firm amidst the shakings and convulsions of the universe. Hence it appears, how highly necessary is an increase of Faith. The desire of its increase is essential to true religion. If you feel no want of Faith, no desire for an enlarged and confirmed persuasion of Divine truth, you are utterly destitute of vital religion. If there

are any of this description now present, let me intreat you to beware of your danger. If there are any who are desirous of increasing their faith, let me recommend to you the most effectual means.

1. The first is prayer. Our text affords an encouraging example. The prayer of the apostles was successful. Their faith was increased; though at one time it was wavering and feeble, it was strengthened from above; they became the ministers of mercy to an afflicted and guilty world, and are now exalted to the regions of glory, to the very vision and presence of God.

2. Converse much with the objects of faith.

Men insensibly become assimilated to the persons they associate with, to the books they read, the sentiments they hear, the manners they behold. Study the Scriptures, therefore; reflect upon the truths of religion: there is a holy infection, I should rather say a sweet, a divine influence, in these contemplations, that will infuse life and vigour into the soul. That Christian is miserably wanting to himself, who suffers a day to pass without searching the Scriptures, or contents himself with a careless hurried perusal. It was the description of a saint in days of old, which has never yet been cancelled—God forbid it ever should be cancelled—that “His

delight was in the law of his Lord ; that he meditated in the law of his God day and night."

The Scriptures are a receptacle of spiritual truth, an inventory of the riches of heaven, a Divine register of the treasures of eternity. As a taste for literature is produced by studying the noblest works of human genius, so your moral taste will be purified, and your spiritual discernment improved, by the study of the Scriptures.

3. Watch against all objects that have a contrary tendency ; set a guard upon your senses ; avoid all objects that encourage the luxury and increase the corruption of the heart. There is nothing obscures the atmosphere of faith so much as the sullen, dark and polluting damps of a sensual mind ; even moderate and innocent gratifications have a tendency to diminish the influence of faith. To walk by sense is directly opposed to walking by faith. Love not the world, seek not to be wealthy ; if riches increase, set not your heart upon them. Dread the consequences of sudden prosperity. Walk in this world as strangers and pilgrims, as sojourners that have no continuing city ; this is not your rest—you cannot secure two worlds. Seek a better country that is a heavenly. Be content to secure a building of God, when this

earthly house of your tabernacle is dissolved :
a house not made with hands eternal in the
heavens.

4. Wait upon God in divine ordinances ; be
diligent in attending upon the services of re-
ligion, and the means of grace, and in all your
worship make it your object to attain an increase
of faith.

END OF VOL. I.





